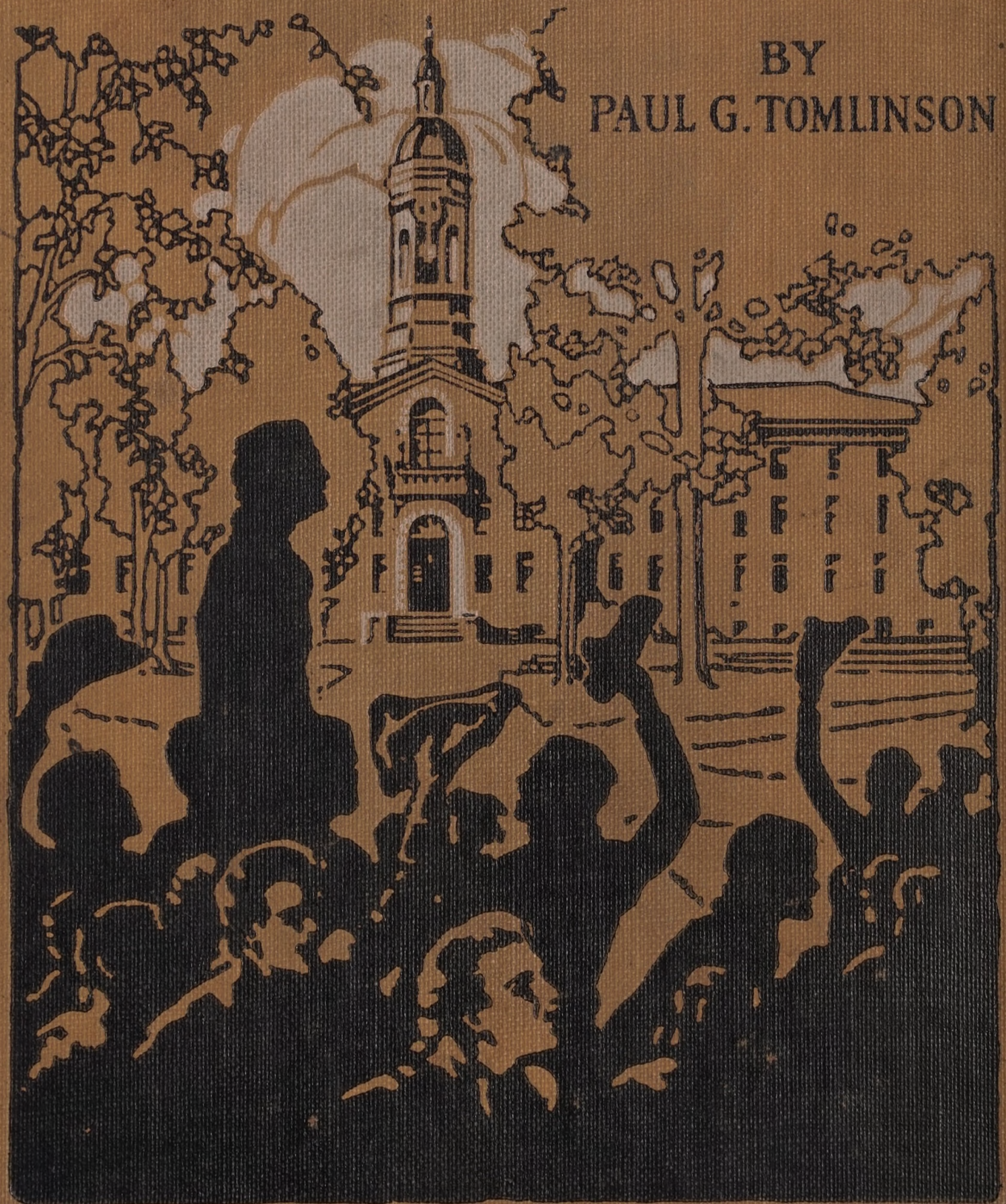


A PRINCETON BOY IN THE REVOLUTION

BY
PAUL G. TOMLINSON





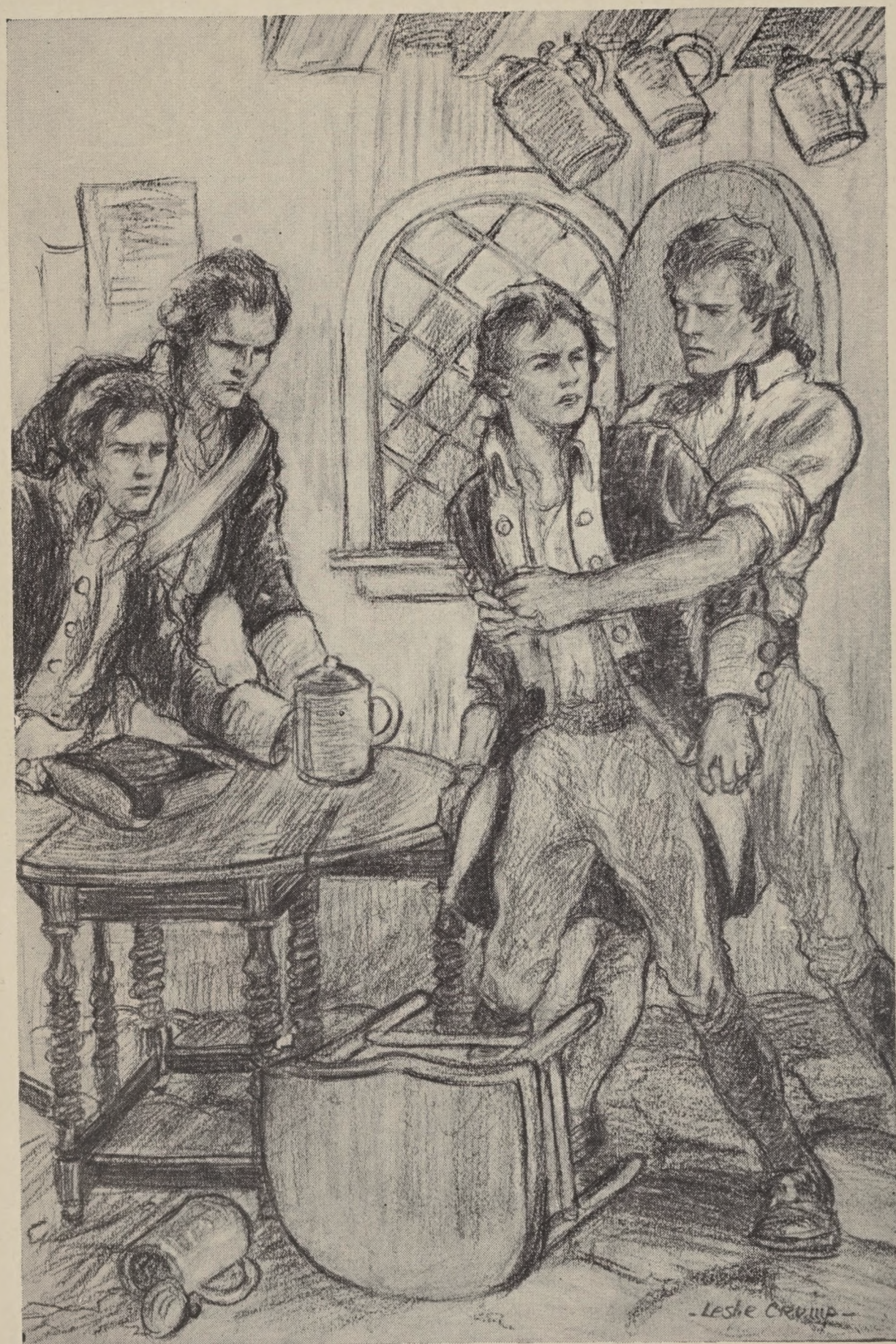
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**A PRINCETON BOY
IN THE REVOLUTION**



A Princeton Boy In the Revolution

BY

PAUL G. TOMLINSON

AUTHOR OF "THE TRAIL OF TECUMSEH," "A PRINCETON BOY
UNDER THE KING," ETC.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
LESLIE CRUMP

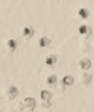


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PREFACE

IN this second volume of the series of Princeton stories I have, as the title indicates, endeavored to cover the Revolutionary period of the college's history. If there is not as much about The College of New Jersey in this book as in the previous volume—or as there will be in those to come—it is because Princeton was so active a seat of war at that time that the college was forced to suspend. The students transferred their attention from books to fighting and my endeavor has been to record the doings of the students.

I have drawn freely upon the excellent histories of Princeton written by Professor Varnum L. Collins, Mr. John F. Hageman and Mr. Edwin M. Norris; "The History of the College of New Jersey," by President John Maclean; "A Brief Narrative of the Ravages of the British and Hessians at Princeton," edited by Professor Collins; and I have taken especial liberties with the wonderfully interesting account

PREFACE

of the Battle of Princeton, recently published by Professor Thomas J. Wertenbaker. I wish to acknowledge these sources. Certain incidents in the story are based upon contemporary accounts of incidents in the battle of Trenton and Princeton. Various histories of the Revolution have also been extremely useful. It gives me particular pleasure to state that one of the most helpful of these was written by my father.

P. G. T.

Princeton, N. J.

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Samuel Smith held him in a grip of steel

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A sight greeted his eyes that made him
stop and gasp 86

Ahead of them they could see the Hes-
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The air was filled with the smell of burnt
powder 200

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CHAPTER I

JULY 9, 1776

EVERY window in Nassau Hall blazed with light. Torches burned brightly on the front steps of the brownstone building. Crowds of people, students, professors and townsfolk, men, women and children, surged back and forth on the front campus, cheering and shouting. Hats were thrown in the air, men shook hands with one another, slapped their neighbors on the back, all talked excitedly.

Professor William Houston stood in the doorway of Nassau Hall, coatless and disheveled, and harangued the gathering. Most of what he said was lost in the din and general confusion, but a little knot of people was gathered close around him and they applauded his remarks

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wildly. The flickering, dancing light of the torches illuminated his thin pale face, and with their uncertain glare made his figure seem unearthly and unreal. But what he was saying was real enough, as those near enough to hear his words could testify.

It was the evening of July 9, 1776, and Princeton, town and gown, was celebrating the signing of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia five days previously. All that afternoon the students had been busy placing candles in the windows, making great torches of tar and pitch to illuminate the campus and the college, and loading guns with blank charges to furnish noise for the evening's demonstration. John Witherspoon, President of the College of New Jersey, was one of the signers of the document proclaiming the independence of the colonies, and with such an ardent patriot at the head of the college it was only natural that the students themselves should have approved the action of the Continental Congress.

Professor Houston was just completing his address. As he neared the close his voice rose higher while the fluxing crowd in front grew quiet and one and all turned to listen.

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“I, for my part,” shouted Professor Houston, “insist that there is but one course open for the inhabitants of these thirteen colonies.” He stretched his arms above his head, both fists clenched. “Independence,” he cried. “Clear and unqualified independence.”

He ceased speaking, and stepped down, mopping his brow. His closing remarks were greeted with silence, silence which endured for only a moment, however, for suddenly such a shout went up as had never been heard before in the little village of Princeton. Then, following close upon the cheering, came a volley of musketry fire, then another, and still another. People pressed forward to shake Professor Houston’s hand, to congratulate him on his speech, and assure him of their complete agreement. He thanked them one and all and in most instances added the wish that Dr. Witherspoon personally might have been present to give, as he expressed it, “the real truth of the matter.”

Gradually the crowd dispersed. Students repaired to their rooms, not to study, for under the circumstances that was out of the question, but to talk over the events of the past few days and to speculate on what the future held

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in store. The townspeople too began to desert the campus, some going to their homes, and others to the *Hudibras Inn*, or *The Sign of the College*, there to discuss over a mug of ale the momentous developments recently come to pass.

"The greatest day of my life," said John Stirling.

"The greatest so far," said Edward Nash, qualifying his roommate's statement.

"Yes," said John. "No doubt there will be greater ones ahead, and more stirring times than we've had yet."

John Stirling was a freshman at the College of New Jersey. He had entered the previous autumn as the result of the urging of his second cousin, Henry Stirling, graduated sixteen years previously. Henry Stirling, now a judge of the Court of Common Pleas in the rapidly growing town of Newark, was one of the most loyal alumni of the little college and he had always been determined that his cousin, twenty years his junior, should enjoy the privileges of Nassau Hall as he had done. Henry Stirling had been one of the most popular students who ever attended the college, but he had seldom worked very hard during his attendance there.

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Out in the world he appreciated the opportunities he had missed, and was accordingly extremely insistent that his young cousin should profit by his mistakes. Consequently he continually urged upon him the importance of study. John listened to this advice and profited by it. He was studious by nature, and had learned early in life that it is possible to combine work and play, and that play is all the more enjoyable when it is well-earned.

He was a slightly built boy, not possessed of marked physical strength, but wiry and capable of great endurance. He was only sixteen when he entered college and had but turned seventeen the month previous to the opening of this story.

His home was in Elizabethtown, where his father was a Presbyterian minister. Aside from being a minister, his father was also one of the most ardent patriots in the colonies, was not afraid to say what he thought, and consequently had several times been in difficulties with the Tories in the neighborhood. Brought up in such an atmosphere and amid such surroundings, it was only natural that John too should be an eager supporter of the cause of

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the colonies. His black eyes flashed as he leaned forward in his chair in his room on the north side of Nassau Hall and spoke to the boy seated opposite him.

“Edward,” he said excitedly, “the die has been cast. People must declare themselves now. This means real war from now on and no one in this part of the country is going to be able to remain neutral.”

“To paraphrase a sentence from the Bible, the Yankee sheep are now going to be divided from the English goats,” said Edward.

“Exactly.”

Edward Nash, the occupant of the chair opposite to John Stirling, had his home in Trenton. The two boys had not known each other before coming to Nassau Hall the previous autumn, but they had been drawn together from the start, perhaps because they were so little alike. Edward Nash was large, he was fat, he was not the least bit studious, he was as blond as John was dark, and while John was inclined to be serious, Edward spent a large percentage of his waking hours in laughter. He loved jokes and merriment, and while he could be serious if the occasion demanded he did not

JULY 9, 1776

choose that mood if it could be avoided. The two boys were virtually inseparable, each one admiring the other for the qualities he himself lacked. As Edward expressed it, "John has everything I haven't got, which of course is a great deal. For my part I amuse John because I am so stupid."

John's version was quite the opposite of his friend's. He liked Edward because he was jolly, full of fun, loyal, courteous and clean-minded,—in other words, a gentleman. He freely admitted he had no idea why it was that Edward liked him in return, because he did not think he had nearly so much to offer as his friend. The fact remained, however, that the two boys were the closest of friends, and were even referred to sometimes as David and Jonathan.

"I think I know a few of the goats," said Edward, keeping to his Biblical reference, "that is, a few of them who have not yet declared themselves."

"They'll not be popular in Princeton long," said John emphatically.

"Tories have not been popular here for some time past."

"Why," exclaimed John, "it was nearly two

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years ago that the students burned all the tea. Professor Houston was telling us about it only this morning after the mathematics class. He said they broke into the college storeroom, took the winter's entire supply, searched students' rooms for private stocks, and burned it all in a huge bonfire right out in front of Nassau Hall. To make the fire burn more brightly they put a figure at its center made to represent Governor Hutchinson of Massachusetts."

"Doctor Witherspoon made no objection either, I'll wager," chuckled Edward.

"None at all according to Professor Houston. He said the president watched the bonfire from a darkened room in his house and secretly was much pleased at the spirit the students showed."

"I can well imagine that," said Edward. "There is no more eager supporter of the colonies' cause than he."

"Remarkable, too, in view of the fact that he has only lived in this country eight years," said John. "It didn't take him long to find out the difference between right and wrong."

"He was born with that knowledge, I think," laughed Edward.

"Most of us learn it soon enough," said

JULY 9, 1776

John. "The trouble is we don't always remember the things we learn."

This discussion of President Witherspoon was suddenly cut short by the precipitous entrance into the room of a young man, coatless, collarless, hair disheveled, and very warm. Also he was out of breath and he stood leaning against the opened door for some moments, panting heavily.

"Well, Tom," exclaimed John, springing to his feet at sight of the newcomer. "What's afoot?"

Thomas Hood mopped his brow and rubbed his face with a large yellow silk handkerchief before replying. He replaced the handkerchief in his hip pocket, drew his sleeve across his face and inhaled several deep breaths.

"War," he exclaimed feebly.

"War?" demanded Edward. "What do you mean?"

"War," repeated Thomas. "War between Britain and the colonies."

John looked at him scornfully. "Why of course there's war," he said. "What else do you suppose is the meaning of Concord and Lexington and Bunker Hill, of Ticonderoga and

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Sullivan's Island? What else do you think the declaration of independence in Philadelphia five days ago could mean? You didn't suppose John Adams and Lord North were going to have a debate, did you?"

"But this means real war," cried Thomas.

"Certainly," said John. "War to the bitter end. Remember that England and America are inhabited by people of the same blood, and you never heard of an Anglo-Saxon running from a fight or quitting before it was over, did you? I guess not."

John Stirling had a habit of asking questions and immediately providing the answers himself. His black eyes snapped as he finished speaking, his hands gripped the back of the chair behind which he was standing, and he leaned forward and looked eagerly at his two friends. "Did you?" he repeated.

"No," said Edward.

"You're right, John," Thomas agreed.

"Well, then, it's war," said John, "and the question is, what are we going to do about it? I'd like to join Washington."

"Professor Houston is already talking about

JULY 9, 1776

organizing a company of volunteers right here in Princeton," said Thomas.

"Is the college to be closed then?" asked Edward.

"Not that I know of," said Thomas. "I don't suppose there are any real plans as yet. Everything seems to be at sixes and sevens."

"Where is President Witherspoon?" asked John. "He's in Philadelphia, and no decision will be made without him. He's the head of this college and will be the one to say what is going to be done here. Make no mistake about that."

"There could be no harm in organizing a militia company anyway," said Thomas. "The more training we have the better qualified we shall be to do our duty when the proper time arrives."

"I'll join," said John.

"And I," said Edward.

"We'd all join, of course," said Thomas.

"And probably hang for it, you scurvy rebels," exclaimed a voice at the window, directly behind the spot where John was standing.

CHAPTER II

THE VOICE

WITH one accord all three boys sprang to the window. The sash was open and they leaned far out in an effort to catch a glimpse of the person who had spoken to them. But the moon was behind a cloud and they were unable to see anything but the faint patches of light thrown through the windows by the candlelight in the rooms of Nassau Hall. A distant shout came to their ears, the wind rustled softly through the leafy branches of the trees, and an owl hooted, but otherwise there was complete silence.

One by one the boys withdrew their heads and resumed their places about the room. John Stirling was the first to speak.

“Don’t you think we had better shut that window?” he inquired. “I do.” Suiting his action to the word, he arose, pulled the window to, and drew the curtain.

“Who do you suppose that could have been?”

THE VOICE

demanded Thomas. He was a trifle pale around the mouth and his blue eyes kept returning to the window through which the voice had come.

"If we only knew," said John between his teeth.

"Did the voice sound familiar to you?" asked Edward in a low tone. John could not help thinking that he had never seen his big friend so solemn. He and Thomas considered this question before answering it. Finally John spoke.

"It was nasal, wasn't it? Come to think about it, it was a rather peculiar voice, and now that you mention it I can't help the feeling that somewhere, some time I have heard it before. Is that the way you feel, Edward?"

"Exactly," said Edward. "I know I've heard that voice before, but when and where I cannot say. But it's familiar to me."

"Well, I've never heard it before," said Thomas, "but I am certain I'll know it if I hear it again. It was as you say, John, rather a nasal voice, high pitched and rasping."

The boys had drawn their chairs closer together and were talking in low, subdued tones.

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Nor was Thomas the only one who cast frequent, furtive glances at the window. They were all tense with excitement and their nerves were somewhat sensitive.

"We'll all know it if we hear it again, I guess," said John. "Let's hope it will be daylight at the time so we can see who our friend is."

"Our friend the Tory," said Thomas.

"Perhaps our friend the spy," said Edward.

"There are many of them about," said John. "For safety's sake it will be the part of wisdom to exercise care in the selection of persons to whom to confide our feelings. It wouldn't be much of a help to the cause of the colonies to get ourselves imprisoned right at the start, would it?"

Footsteps were heard on the stone floor without and before either of John's two friends could reply to his question there came a knock at the door.

"Come in," said Edward.

The door opened and Professor Houston appeared in the doorway. He was a man of about thirty-five, taller than the average, with a clean-shaven face and a square jaw that proclaimed

THE VOICE

him a person of determination. The look of his gray eyes furnished further proof of this and also stamped him as being possessed of intelligence and courage.

“Boys,” he said, “I’m starting for *The Sign of the College* and stopped by to see if you want to join me. There is a meeting there, I understand, and I am eager to know what transpires.”

“What is the meeting about, sir?” inquired John, rising to his feet. The other two boys had also risen from their chairs when the professor entered the room.

“It has to do with the militia company we are talking of organizing here, I believe,” said Professor Houston.

“It is a rather late hour for us to be out,” said Edward.

“No rules will be observed or enforced tonight, I guess,” said the professor with a laugh. “There is too much going on in the world for us to think about college rules. But don’t come unless you feel so inclined.”

“I should like to go,” said John readily.

“And I,” echoed Thomas.

“I personally never had any objection to go-

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ing," said Edward laughingly. "I love to be up late at anything except my studies."

"Come along then, all of you," said Professor Houston. "We ought to find the meeting of considerable interest."

John stepped to the window to convince himself that it was securely fastened. It was tightly bolted, so he picked up his hat from the table where it was lying and followed the others who had already started to leave the room. A moment later the little party of four had emerged from the West entrance of Nassau Hall and were proceeding in the direction of *The Sign of the College*. As they passed the president's house the talk naturally turned to Dr. Witherspoon.

"No doubt he's doing something for the cause of the colonies at this very moment," said Professor Houston. "My only fear is that he may work too hard."

"How old a man is he?" John asked.

"Let me see," said Professor Houston. "He was born in 1722, I believe. That would make him fifty-five years old. Possibly that seems old to you boys, but that's not a very great age after all."

THE VOICE

“No doubt we’ll agree with you when we reach that age ourselves,” laughed Edward. “Dr. Witherspoon came over here eight years ago, didn’t he?”

“In 1768,” said Professor Houston. “He was born in Scotland, as you know, and entered the University of Edinburgh when he was only fourteen years old. He studied there for seven years and then became minister at the church at Beith. Then he was transferred to Paisley a few years later, remaining there until the summer of 1768 when he removed to Princeton.”

“He has done great things for the college,” Edward observed.

“Educationally and from a religious viewpoint too,” said the professor. “It has been astonishing to observe the awakened interest in religion the students have manifested since his arrival. This circumstance became noticeable within less than a year after he took up his duties here.”

“A great man in my opinion,” said John.

“If you think so there can be no doubt of it then,” said Edward with a chuckle.

There was no time to notice Edward’s remark or to pursue the subject of President

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Witherspoon further for they had now arrived before the entrance to *The Sign of the College*. The principal street of Princeton, The King's Highway, was bristling with people that night. Ordinarily it would have been practically deserted at such an hour, and most of the lights in the shops and homes bordering on this, the main thoroughfare from Philadelphia to New York, would have been darkened. The inns would probably have been the only places where evidences of human activities could have been found. Not so the night of July 9, 1776.

Most of the houses and all of the shops were lighted with candles in almost every window. Even the moon, as if it too were aware of the importance of the date to the little town of Princeton, shone with unusual brilliancy. So bright were its beams that it was possible for one to recognize acquaintances on the street.

The Sign of the College was the busiest place on the road. People surged in and out of the entrance, all of them talking at once, and gesticulating violently. Many of the men shook hands with one another. In the taproom toasts were being drunk to the thirteen colonies, to the drafters and signers of the docu-

THE VOICE

ment drawn five days previously in Philadelphia, to General George Washington, to President John Witherspoon for his courageous attitude, to the success of the colonies in the pending conflict,—in fact toasts were being drunk to everything connected in any way with the cause of the colonies. They were many.

In the reception hall was an even greater crowd, packed against one another, and crammed into the corners, until every available inch of room seemed to be occupied. Yet Professor Houston and his three young friends forced their way into the hall despite the jam. It was a warm evening, and inside the inn the air was stifling. Perspiration streamed from the faces of all the men crowded together in the reception hall and stood out in great beads on their foreheads. But no one seemed to mind. Every face was turned towards one end of the room where a man stood upon a table and harangued the assembly. His coat was off, his shirt sleeves rolled up, his stock removed, his hair ruffled,—he put heart and soul and body into what he was saying. And his words were applauded loudly.

Professor Houston pushed his way through

A PRINCETON BOY IN THE REVOLUTION

the door and John followed close behind; he in turn was followed by Thomas and Edward in the order named. Mutterings and grumblings met them as they shoved their way into the room, but finally they were placed and their cramped neighbors forgot them and turned again to the speaker.

“Who is he?” John whispered to Professor Houston.

“Samuel Smith of Maidenhead.”¹

This did not mean anything to John, but circumstances were not favorable to the asking and answering of questions and he held his peace. Mr. Smith was a man to look at twice. He was of huge proportions, thick-necked, deep-chested, and the muscles of his arms stood out in bunches as he clenched his big-jointed fists. He was a man of about twenty-six or twenty-eight years of age, smooth-shaven, with a jaw like a vise, and close-cropped curly black hair.

“No German king on an English throne shall impose unjust laws upon freeborn men and women,” he shouted, holding both arms aloft. “No German king on an English throne shall

¹ Maidenhead is now the village of Lawrenceville, the site of the Lawrenceville School.

THE VOICE

ever succeed in an attempt to enforce those laws upon freeborn men and women. No, nor will any one else ever succeed in such a dastardly undertaking. Not in these thirteen colonies, certainly. Not in the Province of Jersey. Not in the town of Princeton. When any one tries such tricks, I say fight. Fight!" His voice rose higher, almost to a scream.

"Those men who drafted that declaration of the independence of the thirteen colonies knew what they were doing. They also knew the consequences of their acts. And those are, fight! They knew their countrymen would stand by them, and they must not be disappointed. That means you and it means me too. I'm not going to disappoint them. Are you?"

He pointed his finger straight before him as he asked this question and his eyes swept his audience. There was complete silence in the room. Not a man spoke, not a man stirred. For a full minute this silence lasted while Samuel Smith stood on the table, his black eyes flashing, searching the faces of those in front of him, his arms still rigidly outstretched. Then suddenly he turned and sprang from the table to the floor. John could not help but ob-

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serve how graceful he was, like some great cat, he thought.

Instantly pandemonium reigned. Cheers and shouts rent the air, mingled with the stamping of feet and clapping of hands. Some one in the back of the room proposed three cheers for Samuel Smith and they were given with such force that the noise seemed to shake the inn to its very foundations.

A man sprang upon the table recently occupied by Samuel Smith. John recognized him as Mr. Christopher Beekman, the proprietor of *The Sign of the College*. He held up his hand for silence, but it was some time before the noise had subsided sufficiently for him to make himself heard. Some people present were anxious to hear what he had to say and they all began to shout, "Silence, Silence" in such loud tones and so persistently that they made almost as much noise as those whom they were trying to subdue. But comparative order was restored eventually.

"Gentlemen," cried Christopher.

"Yea," cheered the assemblage. They were ready to cheer anything.

THE VOICE

“Gentlemen, we have all heard Mr. Smith’s remarks—”

“Yea,” cheered the assemblage.

“And,” continued Mr. Beekman, “I think we owe him a vote of thanks for the forceful way he has stated our case and pointed out our duty.”

“Yea.”

“I have an announcement to make,” the proprietor went on. “It is that the meeting scheduled here for this evening to discuss plans for the formation of a company of militia has been postponed until to-morrow morning and will be held in the refectory of Nassau Hall.

“Yea,” cheered the crowd, evidently under the impression that every pause in the speaker’s remarks called for a vocal demonstration.

“Every one is urged to be present at eleven o’clock in the forenoon,” said Mr. Beekman. As the crowd started to cheer this announcement he held up his hand. “To-night,” he said, “*The Sign of the College* invites you to step into the taproom, and as its guest, drink to the success of the great undertaking on which our thirteen colonies now are launched.”

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This invitation brought forth more cheers than any of the other announcements, almost as hearty ones, in fact, as had greeted the conclusion of Samuel Smith's oration.

Professor Houston and his three young friends decided not to avail themselves of the inn's hospitality for the hour was late and they were tired after the hard work of the day. Moreover, the crowd surging towards the tap-room was so dense that it seemed a hopeless task to force one's way in to where the evidences of hospitality were being served.

"Tell me about Samuel Smith," urged John as they emerged onto the street. "Who is he?"

"He's a farmer," said Professor Houston, "a graduate of Nassau Hall in the class of 1770, I believe, with a farm between here and Maidenhead, just beyond the line dividing East from West Jersey. Beyond that and the fact that he is a man of standing in the community I know little about him."

"He's evidently a patriot," said Edward with a laugh.

"And reputed to possess greater physical strength than any other man in this section of

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the country," said Professor Houston. "It is said he can bend a poker in his bare hands."

"I hope he doesn't ever find it necessary to try his strength on me," said Edward. "I promise never to anger him if it can be avoided."

They passed out into the street and turned their steps towards Nassau Hall. Late as it was many candles were still burning in the windows of the houses along The King's Highway and numbers of pedestrians were still abroad. Lights still glowed in Nassau Hall and students, scantily clad because of the heat, were moving about the corridors and stopping in their friends' rooms to discuss the momentous news of the day.

"Better go to bed," said Professor Houston as they reached the entrance to the building. "It has been a trying day and you must be tired. There will be no classes to-morrow of course, and in the morning we shall be busy with the meeting of those interested in forming the company of militia."

They stood in the entrance hall ready to separate. "Good-night," said Professor Houston.

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“Good-night, sir,” repeated the three boys respectfully.

The professor turned to the left and the boys to the right. Thomas roomed directly across the hall from John and Edward and they all stopped for a moment before his door to chat. Before they had time to say more than a few words two people entered the West entrance of the building and walked towards them. The newcomers were talking together and one of them had a voice that was nasal, high pitched and rasping. The minute the boys heard it they lapsed into complete silence and crowding close against the wall waited for the two men to pass.

CHAPTER III

ANOTHER VOICE

THE two men offered the boys "good-evening" as they passed and the three boys returned the greeting. Then they hurriedly entered John's and Edward's room and closed and bolted the door behind them. Thomas drew the curtains across the window while Edward struck a light and lighted the candles. Their beams disclosed John standing in the center of the room, his thin nervous hands clutching the back of a chair, a characteristic pose.

"Well," he exclaimed, as his two friends faced him, "do you think that was the same voice we heard earlier in the evening? I do."

"I'd be quite willing to wager it was the same," said Edward. "Who is that man anyway?"

"The new steward, Robinson," said Thomas. "Just arrived to-day."

"He'll bear watching," said John grimly.

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“First thing we know he’ll be poisoning our food.”

“I doubt if he’d go as far as that,” laughed Edward. “He’d be found out surely and what would happen to him then wouldn’t make the risk worth his while.”

“Well, who knows anything about him?” asked John.

“I know only a little,” said Thomas. “I heard Professor Houston telling some one this afternoon that he is a strange, silent sort of a man who has come here from Brunswick. That’s all I know.”

“It was certainly his voice outside the window this evening,” exclaimed Edward confidently. “A Tory spy I vow.”

“We’re not positive,” said Thomas, always conservative.

“No,” Edward admitted, “but pretty positive.”

“Quite positive, I should say,” said John, “but Tom is right,—we are not certain and it would not be wise to say anything or do anything without having more positive proof. I suggest that we keep our suspicions to ourselves for the time being at least.”

ANOTHER VOICE

“But keep our eyes and ears open nevertheless,” added Edward.

“Of course,” Thomas assented readily.

The clock in the tower struck twelve.

“Midnight,” exclaimed John. “I had no idea it was so late.”

“Time to go to bed,” said Thomas. “I’ll leave you now. We must be at the meeting in the refectory to-morrow morning without fail.”

“And be there early,” said John. “There will be a large crowd on hand.”

“Till morning, then,” said Thomas, and unbolting the door he opened it and passed out into the hallway. A few short moments later Edward and John were fast asleep, their slumbers undisturbed by any thoughts of Tory spies. They did dream of red-coated British soldiers and Hessians, however, and when they were discussing their dreams while dressing the following morning the mention of Hessians aroused the ire of both of them.

“German butchers,” cried John warmly. “What are they doing over here anyhow?”

“They’re here because King George hired them to come,” said Edward, his blue eyes flashing angrily.

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"I've heard," said John, "that the Prince of Hesse put them at the disposal of King George because of a gambling debt he couldn't otherwise pay. A fine state of affairs."

"I don't suppose the men themselves are to blame."

"No," said John, "possibly not. It's the fault of their ruler, the Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel, I believe is his title."

"One of the hostlers at the *Hudibras* told me he had seen some of them," said Edward, "big men all of them, with high fur hats, long jack-boots that reach to their thighs, a long, heavy, cruel spur on each foot, short, thick broad-swords, short carbines, and a heavy gun. Think of having to suffer under all that equipment, and they never vary it, I understand, under any conditions."

"Stupid, I say," said John, drawing on his boots.

"Stupid, of course," Edward assented. "This hostler told me though that the most impressive thing about them are their mustaches. Every man wears one, a long one, and it is said that every morning they dye them with shoe-blackening."

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“They must be ferocious looking beasts.”

“Well, I should say so. Quite a contrast to the smooth-shaven American Continentals.”

“How many Hessians are there over here?”

“Twenty thousand, I hear,” said Edward.

“Good fighters, too.”

“Trained on the battlefields of Europe. They ought to be.”

“Yes,” said John, fire in his dark eyes, “but remember that warfare in Europe and America are entirely different propositions. The kind of fighting they do over there won’t go here at all.”

“We’ll hope not anyway,” said Edward, slipping his arms into his coat. “Our ‘armed mob’ gave the English something to think about at Bunker Hill, that’s sure.”

“And what worries me is that they may have learned a lesson from that that will make them better soldiers from now on,” said John. “They had a good lesson up there at Boston and no doubt have profited by it.”

“Do you realize this?” asked Edward, standing in front of his roommate and looking him squarely in the eye. “You and I are certain to be in the army before many weeks have

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passed and it won't be long after that before we meet the British and Hessians face to face on the field of battle. Then we can tell for ourselves what kind of soldiers they are."

John did not reply for a moment. His face lost some of its color as he thought of what Edward had just said, but as the color went out of his cheeks his jaw grew more and more set, and the pupils of his eyes grew smaller and darker. His hands gripped the arms of the chair in which he was seated until his knuckles showed white.

"Yes, I realize it," he said at length.

"It may mean,—"

"Yes," said John, as Edward hesitated, "it may mean that, but it's a just cause. I know what my duty is, and I mean to do it."

"Well, then," said Edward in a different tone of voice, "let's go down to breakfast, and see what old Rusty-Voice has provided for us to eat."

If any of the three friends had any fear of poisoned food he did not show it at breakfast. They did full justice to the meal, and only regretted that the new steward was nowhere in evidence. Each boy had hoped to get a closer

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view of him, and study him in greater detail than had been possible previously.

When breakfast was done they went out onto The King's Highway and joined the knots of citizens gathered at frequent intervals along the road, and in particular in front of the taverns. Excitement was still at high pitch and there was talk in endless quantities. But the boys found it all interesting, although they took no really active part in the various conversations.

Later in the morning they attended the meeting in the refectory, and found the room almost as crowded as the room at *The Sign of the College* had been the previous evening. The upshot of the meeting was that a militia company was organized, and Professor Houston was elected a captain. Samuel Smith, who had declaimed in such fiery manner the night before, declined election as an officer, protesting that he had had no military experience and was therefore unfitted for a commission. He enlisted as a private, declaring that he would become an officer if he earned the honor, but not otherwise.

Among the other privates sworn in were John

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Stirling, Edward Nash, and Thomas Hood. Six months was the period for which every one enlisted.

After dinner that day the three friends were talking things over in Thomas' room when the door was opened and an evil-looking face thrust itself upon their gaze.

"Fine wild strawberries for sale," said the owner of it.

"Get out of here," shouted Thomas and reached for a boot.

The face was withdrawn as suddenly as it had appeared, and the door slammed after it.

"Curse that fellow," said Thomas with a laugh. "I never did like him and I won't stand for him sticking his crooked nose into my room. Why doesn't he stay in his store? He's a good-for-nothing hound and nothing more. While the college was regularly in session he never dared come over here."

"Fleetmann, that's his name, isn't it?" asked Edward.

"It is," replied John, although the question had been addressed to Thomas. "Did you notice his voice?"

Both Edward and Thomas seemed to start

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slightly at this query, and they looked at John, then at each other, and back at John again.

“Did you?” John repeated.

“Why,” exclaimed Thomas, “I hadn’t thought of it before, but his voice is just like Robinson’s.”

“Exactly like Robinson’s,” cried Edward.

“Identical,” said John.

CHAPTER IV

THE WAR COMES NEARER

“Is Fleetmann a Tory?” asked Edward.

“I don’t know anything about him,” said Thomas, “except that I believe him to be a scoundrel, who wouldn’t hesitate to be a Tory or anything else that would make money for him.”

“You don’t trust the gentleman, do you?” laughed John.

“I do not,” exclaimed Thomas warmly. “And yet I don’t know why I feel about him as I do. I really know nothing about him, but from the first minute I laid eyes on him I have disliked him, and I have an aversion to him that is increased with every time I see him.”

“Well, it’s a curious thing his voice being so much like Robinson’s,” said Edward. “Which one do you suppose it was called in the window at us last night?”

“Neither one, maybe,” said John.

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“What do you mean by that?” demanded Edward.

“Well,” said John, “if it’s possible for those two to have voices so nearly alike why isn’t it possible for still a third or fourth person to have the same kind of a voice too?”

“It is possible,” said Thomas, “but do you think it is probable?”

“No, I don’t,” John replied, “but I’ve been thinking it over, and it seems to me that Robert Tryon has the same kind of a nasal voice as those two. Robert, if you will remember, has never been an enthusiastic supporter of the cause of the colonies.”

“That’s true, John,” said Edward. “Perfectly true.”

“I’m becoming giddy thinking about it,” laughed Thomas. “I guess the only thing to do is to suspect everybody.”

“Even President Witherspoon?” asked Edward facetiously.

“He’s one man I guess we can trust,” said Thomas.

The days that followed were exciting ones in the College of New Jersey. Previous to the

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signing of the Declaration of Independence President Witherspoon had been opposed to his students leaving college to enlist in the army. He had considered them too young. In the face of his protests, however, a small company of volunteers had marched away in the spring and joined the Continental forces. And now that the Congress had taken a definite stand there was no holding the boys any longer. As a matter of fact President Witherspoon made no attempt to discourage them now.

The students, that is the majority of them, scattered hastily to their homes, most of them to enlist in the regiments being formed in their home districts. One of them, John Bayard, of the Class of 1777, a close friend of John Stirling, was captured by a band of British troops while on his way to his home in Philadelphia. He was denounced as a rebel and a son of a rebel, flung into prison and sentenced to be hanged as a spy. John's mother, Mrs. Bayard, pleaded with General Washington to intercede for her son, and with his aid, and as the result of an interview the distracted woman was able to get with Sir William Howe, commander of the British army in New York,

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John was released at the very last moment, when, in fact, the halter had actually been adjusted about his neck.

The story of this adventure naturally created a profound impression in Princeton. It frightened some, but on the whole it served rather to strengthen than weaken the determination of most people. Other stories poured in in abundance; of the Hessians on Staten Island and their cruelty, thievery, and ferocity; of the skirmishes of the people of Elizabethtown with them across the Kill von Kull; of the Tory persecution of the patriots; the Indian raids on the people of the colonies; the increasing numbers in the British army; the size and strength of the British fleet in New York harbor.

Then one day early in September, when John, Edward and Thomas had finished drilling and were taking tea at the home of Mrs. Leonard, one of the residents of the town, they received their first news of the battle of Long Island. A young officer on Washington's staff had been dispatched by the Commander-in-chief to Philadelphia with a message to Congress. He was the son of an old friend of Mrs. Leonard's and

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stopped at her house for a bit of refreshment before continuing his journey. He arrived shortly after the three boys.

“Mrs. Leonard,” cried the young officer, Roger Barton by name, “we have had a serious defeat. Our men were taken prisoners to the number of a thousand or more, and we lost four hundred killed.”

His eyes filled with tears as he spoke. The three boys listened with eyes almost starting from their sockets. Mrs. Leonard was easily the calmest of all.

“Roger,” she said gently, “you must remember that nothing worth while is easy to get. We cannot have smooth sailing all the time, you know. Setbacks are bound to come, and perhaps this one may be a blessing in disguise. The people of this country are not yet fully aroused to the size of the task we have undertaken. Perhaps this bitter defeat will serve as a reminder that if we are to be victorious we must all exert ourselves far more than we have done as yet.”

“I hope and pray you may be right,” said Lieutenant Barton earnestly. “I also believe General Washington thinks as you do.”

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“Can you tell us something about the battle, Lieutenant?” asked John eagerly. “We are more than anxious to hear about it.”

“It’s not a very pleasant tale to relate,” said the lieutenant with a wry smile, “and of course I don’t know all the details as yet, but I’ll gladly tell you what I do know of it.”

Mrs. Leonard replenished his tea cup and he settled back in his chair and began his story.

“Our army,” he said, “consisted of about eighteen thousand men, one-half of them on Long Island under General Nathanael Greene, the rest in New York under the direct command of General Washington. Greene’s army had been working desperately all summer to fortify Brooklyn Heights, an important position of great value in helping General Washington to hold New York, that is if New York itself could be held. The trouble always was that we could never tell where the British were going to launch their attack. It was a problem whether to put more men on Long Island and thus expose New York, or to move them over from Brooklyn and make the heights easy to take. Another sad circumstance,—of course I should not like to be quoted—was that General Greene

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was taken sick and General Israel Putnam succeeded to the command. Old 'Put' is a fine man, but he hasn't the ability of Greene.

“Well, to get on with the story. On August 22 Howe landed twenty thousand men at Gravesend Bay. Four roads run from there to Brooklyn Heights where our men were located. Meanwhile Howe's brother, Admiral Richard Howe, in command of the British fleet, was feigning an attack upon New York from the water. Naturally that prevented Washington from sending any help to the army on Long Island. Then on the twenty-seventh the British started from Gravesend Bay, marching all night in order to surprise us. They moved in three detachments, and, making use of all roads, a small force of our men under Lord Stirling were caught between the various British detachments and almost completely surrounded; they tried to escape by swimming the Gowanus Creek, but few got across. Haslet's Delawares and Smallwood's Marylanders were almost all killed, drowned or captured. Lord Stirling himself was taken prisoner.

“Meanwhile General Sullivan and his army

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too had been caught between the Hessians and British. They also suffered terribly and most of those who were not killed were captured. General Washington of course was terribly upset, and immediately crossed to Brooklyn Heights to the aid of the men who were shut in behind the fortifications they had erected there.

“We all expected that the British would storm the Heights, but for some reason they delayed, and the delay gave General Washington an opportunity to prove that he is a great leader. At least that’s the way I feel about it. Fog and rain had set in and on the night of August 29 Washington decided to evacuate the Heights and move his army across to New York.”

Lieutenant Barton sat up in his chair, and banged one arm of it with his hand.

“He did it,” he exclaimed, his eyes flashing. “He moved men, horses, supplies, guns and ammunition across the river without the loss of a single one of them. When the British woke up the next morning the earthworks on the Heights were empty and deserted and the last

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line of boats with our men and supplies on board were safely out of gunshot range on the New York side of the river.”

“A marvelous feat,” cried John enthusiastically. “Our army is now safe in New York then.”

“Not ‘safe,’ I’m afraid,” said Lieutenant Barton, “but in a much less perilous predicament than it was before.”

“What comes next?” asked Edward. The three boys had listened with rapt attention to every word of Lieutenant Barton’s story. Never had anything they had heard been so interesting, and each one of them pictured himself as presently engaged in doing the same things the young lieutenant had related of the soldiers in and about New York.

“Who can tell?” exclaimed Lieutenant Barton with a sigh. “Things look rather black at the present time.”

He rose to take his leave. His message to Congress was a pressing one and he was obliged to hurry on his way. His horse had been curried and watered and it was time to continue his journey. Already his mount was waiting for him in front of the house.

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“Wouldn’t you like to know what the message is he carries?” exclaimed Thomas, when the lieutenant had gone on his way, and the three boys were walking back to Nassau Hall.

“I’d much rather know what is going to happen to our army in New York,” said John. “I’m also impatient to be a part of it myself.”

Two months later his desire to be a part of the army was realized. His wish to know the fate of the Continental army in New York also was gratified. The Battle of White Plains on October 28, 1776, had gone against the Americans, and General Howe, pushing on up the Hudson, moved against the forts erected on each side of the river, Fort Washington and Fort Lee. On November 16 Fort Washington, on the New York side, fell with the loss of three thousand men and a great quantity of supplies. Three days later Fort Lee, on the Jersey side, also succumbed, and its garrison, surprised and panic-stricken by the sudden appearance of the redcoats on their northern flank, were so terrified that they fled like a frightened mob, abandoning arms, ammunition, tents, baggage,

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everything they possessed, even to their cooking utensils.

The outlook was dark indeed. General Washington gathered together what was left of his army and presently was in full flight across the Jerseys. More of his men were prisoners in New York than he had with him on the march. The colonists were disheartened and many of those whose faith had been wavering now openly cast their lots in with the Crown. The British boasted that the rebellion was at an end, and with their armies in close pursuit of Washington's battered little force it seemed as if their boasts were justified.

To make matters worse, General Lee, whose negligence had been largely responsible for the fall of the fort named after him, repeatedly ignored Washington's orders to bring his army into Jersey and join forces with the commander-in-chief. Scarcely three thousand men remained with Washington when early in December he reached the village of Brunswick, and practically every one of the three thousand was hungry, ill-clad, discouraged, forlorn and homesick. It seemed as if it were only a question of time before the colonists must abandon what

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looked to be a forlorn hope. So the British thought at any rate, and so confident were they that the end had come that a large percentage of their soldiers were sent home. Lord Cornwallis himself was expecting to sail for England shortly, the task of defeating what remained of the American army being delegated to the Hessians. Few people, least of all the Hessians themselves, expected that they would have any difficulty in accomplishing this purpose.

Rumors of this condition of affairs reached Princeton and served to depress further the drooping spirits of the people. Many men who had joined the militia company resigned on one pretext or another until merely a skeleton of it remained.

“Disgraceful,” cried John Stirling angrily. “A pack of chicken-hearted fools. I have no use for people who quit when things start to go against them.”

“Nor I,” said Edward. “What do you say to our starting out on our own account towards Brunswick to meet the army and joining it as volunteers?”

“I’ll do it,” exclaimed Thomas. “I’m tired of waiting around. The college is closed so far

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as any studying is concerned, and there is no use in our delaying any longer."

The three boys, together as usual, were engaged in talking about the thing that was always uppermost in their minds. They were sitting on the bridge over Stony Brook by Bruyere's Mills, whither they had walked from the town in order to be undisturbed and free to talk as they pleased. And as they sat there a horseman approached from the direction of Maidenhead, and drew rein in front of them. It was Samuel Smith.

"You look discouraged," he exclaimed.

"Like everybody else," said John soberly.

"Don't include me," said Samuel. "I feel better than I have in a long time."

"You must have some good news then," said Thomas. "What is it?"

"I'm on my way to join the army."

The three boys sprang to the ground at these words and looked at the speaker eagerly.

"That's just what we had decided to do," said John. "Are you in such a hurry that you can't wait until we are ready to go along with you? I'm sure you're not."

"Well," replied Samuel Smith with a laugh,

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“I’m in a pretty big burry, but from what I hear General Washington and his army may reach Princeton at almost any time, and it may be he will come to us before we can get to him.”

“Are they as close as that?” demanded Edward.

“So I hear.”

This rumor was confirmed when they arrived back at Nassau Hall. A scout had just ridden into town with word that the advance guard of the army would arrive in about two hours, and that as many of the soldiers as could be accommodated would be quartered in the college itself. This news precipitated immediate confusion and excitement, and feverish preparations for their reception were inaugurated at once. Naturally the boys decided to wait for the army to come to them, particularly as the report was that it might encamp at Princeton for several days.

President Witherspoon was scarcely ever at Princeton now. As an active member of Congress he was obliged to pass most of his time at Philadelphia, but somehow managed every few weeks to be sent to New York and of course always arranged to stop long enough at Prince-

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ton to see how the affairs of the college were progressing. Even though teaching had practically ceased, the property was there and had to be watched over. In the president's absence this duty had devolved upon Professor Houston, and had become so arduous that he had been obliged to resign his commission in the militia. His ardor had not cooled, however, and upon receipt of word that the Continental Army was approaching Princeton called a meeting of all those who intended to enlist.

John, Edward and Thomas naturally were among those who presented themselves, as was Samuel Smith. The boys expected him, of course, but they were considerably startled to observe that three of the volunteers were Robinson, the Steward, Fleetmann, the storekeeper, and Arthur Tryon, their fellow student. At least one of these three, they felt certain, was not to be trusted, and could be enlisting in the Continental Army for no good purpose. Which one was it, that was the question.

CHAPTER V

A MESSENGER

Two days later John Stirling, Edward Nash and Thomas Hood were regularly enrolled privates in the Continental Army. They had been duly sworn in, provided with muskets and what scanty equipment remained at the disposal of the quartermaster. This did not include full uniforms, as only coats remained to be distributed. The army was not only short of equipment of all kinds, but had no money with which to buy, not enough in fact to pay the soldiers, and there were frequent grumblings among the men on this account.

John Stirling was not grumbling, however. He was in the army, his long cherished dream was realized and he was happy. He was happier still when the very afternoon of the day he had enlisted he was called to the room in Nassau Hall where his new company captain, Elihu Robbins, had his quarters, and entrusted

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with an important mission from General Washington himself.

“Stirling,” said Captain Robbins, “you are considered a good horseman, I understand.”

“I have always been accustomed to riding a great deal, sir,” replied John modestly.

“You know this Jersey country well?”

“Yes, sir,” said John, and this was the truth. All his life he had accompanied his father on his travels about the Province in connection with the affairs of the Presbyterian Church. The Reverend Joshua Stirling had for many years been a member of the Presbytery and obliged to do considerable traveling in connection with the duties of his office.

“You know where Morristown is?” asked Captain Robbins.

“Yes, sir.”

“And how to reach that town from here?”

“Yes, sir.”

“General Lee and his army are encamped at Morristown,” said Captain Robbins. “I have here a very important message to be delivered to General Lee in person. Professor Houston tells me you are a young man to be trusted and one who knows the country well. I am there-

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fore entrusting this message to you to carry to General Lee. Speed is an important consideration and I urge you to use all possible haste in carrying this note to its proper destination."

He handed John an envelope, sealed with heavy red wax, and addressed to General Charles Henry Lee. John placed it in the inside pocket of his coat.

"Can you leave within the hour?" asked Captain Robbins.

"I can leave in fifteen minutes," said John.

"Good. You will find a horse at the *Hudibras* waiting for you. Merely ask for Corporal Hoagland and he will know about the animal you are to ride."

"Yes, sir," said John.

"That is all," said Captain Robbins, "except of course that you are not to disclose to any one the commission you are to execute, or anything about it." He looked John squarely in the eye.

"Of course not," said John, inwardly angry that the captain should think it necessary to mention such a thing, which John considered should be taken as a matter of course.

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“Report back to me upon the fulfillment of your mission,” said Captain Robbins.

“Here at Nassau Hall, sir?”

“Wherever the army happens to be,” said Captain Robbins, and his mouth was twisted into a wry smile. “God only knows where that will be a week hence.”

He nodded curtly, and John saluted—rather self-consciously—and left the room. As he stepped into the corridor he bumped full into Robinson, the steward.

“I beg pardon,” they both exclaimed together, and passed on.

It did not occur to John at first that there was anything unusual in his meeting Robinson there, but as he walked down the hall and the steward’s unpleasant nasal voice remained in his ears he could not help but recall the words that had been uttered outside his window that evening in the previous July, and he wondered if Robinson had been there by accident after all. To be sure he and Edward and Thomas kept as close a watch as they could on the three men whose voices were like the one which they had heard that night, and none of them had been able to discover anything out of the way

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in the actions of any of the persons they suspected. Yet they did suspect them all, and the feeling that all was not quite right had persisted. He wondered if Robinson was a spy. Certainly he was a mysterious person, and John was unable to shake off the feeling of uneasiness which had assailed him upon meeting the steward outside the captain's door. Could he have overheard?

He had little time to think about such things now, however. He stopped to say good-by to Thomas and Edward, and found Samuel Smith with them.

"Where you going, John?" demanded Edward as his erstwhile roommate appeared before him, booted and spurred, musket in hand, and a knapsack across his shoulders.

"I'm not at liberty to say," said John. "I've been ordered to deliver a message and am starting at once."

His friends recognized from the seriousness of his manner that it was important business upon which he was engaged, and they did not press him further.

"Lucky dog," was Samuel Smith's only comment.

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“Getting into action quickly, aren’t you, John?” said Thomas enviously. “I hope we’re going to see you soon again.”

“I hope so,” said John, “but it’ll be several days at the least.” He shook hands with them all.

“Good-by,” he said.

“Good-by and good luck,” they replied in chorus.

He went out, and five minutes later presented himself at the *Hudibras*. In response to his inquiry Corporal Hoagland appeared, a giant of a man wearing a coonskin cap, and without a word led John around to the rear of the inn where the stables were located.

“Wait here,” he directed, and left John standing in the center of the stable yard, while he disappeared inside.

A moment later he reappeared, leading a roan horse by the bridle. John, who loved horses, could see at a glance that the animal was unusually well-bred, and had the appearance of one able to make speed. The horse had a keen and intelligent eye, and an alert expression which delighted the young messenger. And a moment later, when he had scratched the horse’s

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ear, patted his neck and slipped a bit of sugar between his eager lips, the intelligent beast thrust his nose again into John's hand, and whinnied softly as if to say, "I always know when people like animals and you're one who does. I'll do my best for you."

"You won't need spurs with him," said Corporal Hoagland. "Just talk to him and he'll do the rest."

A moment later John had lifted himself into the saddle, and was cantering out of the stable yard. As he reached the main road, The King's Highway, and turned northeast, two men, standing beneath the sweeping branches of an old beech tree, hailed him.

"Fine horse you've got there," said one, and John recognized Robert Tryon. The other man was Fleetmann, the erstwhile storekeeper. Both of them wore the insignia of the Continental Army, but John did not like the idea of their being on hand to see him start his journey.

"Yes," he said curtly, and, momentarily forgetting Corporal Hoagland's instructions, he touched the horse's flanks with the spurs. The sensitive animal, unaccustomed to such treatment, started so suddenly that John was nearly

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thrown from the saddle, and then he was off like a deer, racing at a mad pace down the road. For a few moments he had all he could do to stick on the horse's back, and it was not until they had reached a point opposite the entrance to *Castle Howard*,—the plantation of Captain William Howard, formerly an officer in the British Army, but now an ardent patriot,—that he succeeded in quieting his excited mount. When the animal was entirely calm the young messenger dismounted and removed his spurs so that there should be no recurrence of the accident.

He mounted again and resumed his journey. Darkness was rapidly descending, for it was December and night came early; the weather too was bitter cold, and John was frequently obliged to drop the reins and slap his chilled fingers against his thighs to keep the blood circulating in them. And as he jogged along he revolved in his mind the fact that Robinson, Fleetmann and Robert Tryon, the three people with the nasal voices, had all happened to be about just when he was starting on his journey. Had they just "happened" to be on hand? It was a curious coincidence anyway that these

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particular three had been the ones out of all the army whom he had particularly noticed as he was leaving Princeton.

What did it all mean? Did it mean anything at all?

“I’m nervous, I guess,” John muttered to himself and tried to put the whole affair out of his mind.

He decided he would continue on until he came to the hills along which the road ran to Morristown. He knew of a farmhouse where he and his father had found a welcome and refreshment on one of their journeys together; he knew that Mr. and Mrs. Van Pelt, who lived there, were loyal supporters of the colonies and was confident they would be happy to care for him and his horse for a few hours.

He had not covered many miles, however, before black night closed in upon him. For nearly an hour and a half now he had met no one, but John was not sorry to have the road to himself. One could never tell whether the traveler met with was friend or foe, and to avoid having to settle this important point John was content to meet no one at all.

His horse could not travel faster than a walk

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in the darkness, however, and John began to feel pretty lonely. The road was lined with heavy woods on both sides and was dark as a pocket. Once in a while the young messenger caught a glimpse of the stars between the naked branches of the trees overhead, and their yellow, friendly glimmer always helped to cheer him up. But gradually, imperceptibly almost, a feeling of uneasiness began to creep over him. What the feeling betokened he could not understand at first, and it was only after he had experienced it for a considerable time that he was able to define it.

And when he did understand it it did not add to his peace of mind. It was the feeling—sensation describes it better perhaps—that often comes to men on lonely and perilous missions. Just when he was definitely conscious of it John never knew, but all of a sudden he found himself certain of the fact that he was being followed.

CHAPTER VI

ON THE ROAD AT NIGHT

WHEN this feeling finally took definite shape in John's mind he was so startled that he reined in his horse and sat there in the darkness, literally quaking in his boots. Shivers ran up and down his spine, and the weird call of a screech owl in a nearby tree so startled him that he almost cried aloud in terror. The silence of the night oppressed him and the darkness seemed to settle down about him like a shroud.

The wind rustled through the brown leaves of an oak tree, which with the stubbornness of its kind had retained its leaves long after all the others had shed theirs, and he fancied the noise to be human voices. His horse blew through his nostrils and the sound seemed to John loud enough to be heard in the camp of Cornwallis, miles away. How long he sat there in that lonely spot he did not know, but it seemed like hours.

Finally he regained partial control of himself

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and with a great effort of the will told himself that his fears were groundless, that he was a coward to lose his nerve so completely, and that nothing was to be feared except his own imagination. He clucked to the horse and resumed his slow progress towards the home of the Van Pelts, now some six miles distant.

But the feeling that he was being followed persisted. When he had gone a half mile farther he found himself halted in the center of the road, once more listening with every sense alert for sounds of some one approaching from behind. The sougning of the wind through the bare branches of the trees was all that he heard, and presently he urged his mount onward again, cursing himself for being such a fool. The woods disappeared a short distance ahead, and the stars shone so brilliantly in the winter sky that the road was fairly discernible and he urged his horse into a trot. The sound of the hoofs on the frozen road revived his spirits somewhat, and the motion set his blood to circulating faster so that he felt warmer and more at ease.

When he entered the next wooded stretch, however, his spirits drooped again, and again

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the feeling came over him that some one was following him. Once more he stopped his horse and listened. Like a statue carved from stone he sat, straining his ears for the sound he dreaded to hear. The wind moaned through the bare tree tops, and the stars shed their ghostly light in faint patterns on the narrow road, but John heard nothing.

“I’m an arrant coward or a fool, one or the other,” he muttered. “Perhaps I’m going crazy.”

He drew in a long breath, and straightened up in the saddle, resolved to keep a firm grip upon himself, and not allow himself to be frightened again by his own imagination.

Suddenly he heard a noise that caused him to grow first cold all over and then hot. He felt powerless to move. His tongue seemed cloven to the roof of his mouth when he tried to cluck to his horse. And yet the sound in itself was not of a terrifying nature. It was merely the noise made by a horse’s hoofs on frozen ground. The sound came from in back of him, and the horse was galloping.

John was at a loss what to do. His first impulse was to urge his own mount forward

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as fast as he could and try to outdistance his pursuer, for he had not the slightest doubt that the mysterious horseman was anything else. On second thought, however, he decided that such a course would be foolish. If he attempted such a race he might not win it, and if he did win his horse would be tired for the coming day. Furthermore, he was not well acquainted with the road and feared to risk possible injury to his mount.

Meanwhile the sound of the hoof beats grew louder. John suddenly decided that the best plan would be for him to try to escape the notice of the other horseman entirely. He turned his horse aside from the road and walked him slowly into the woods. He penetrated about fifty yards, dismounted and tethered the animal to a sapling, and after satisfying himself as to the priming of his rifle, crept back towards the road. A few moments later he had established himself behind a large beech tree, and there he awaited the coming of the other rider.

Closer and closer came the noise of the galloping hoofs.

“He’s in an awful hurry,” thought John,

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who, now that the thing he feared was close at hand, was calmer than he had been for an hour. "He's taking chances with his horse, too, on this road."

As this thought ran through the young messenger's mind the horseman was possibly a hundred yards distant. Immediately the horse stopped galloping and slowed down to a walk. John did not like this, and as he gripped his rifle more tightly he felt a sickening sensation in the pit of his stomach. The fear also assailed him that his horse might whinny a greeting to the passing stranger and thus disclose his presence. He waited and listened in a panic lest the horseman should stop. Never, it seemed to him, had he heard a horse walk so slowly.

He strained his eyes in the darkness for a glimpse of the traveler. A faint, slowly moving blur was all he could make out, but the main thing with John was that it should keep moving. And keep moving it did, steadily along the road. To John it seemed as if hours were required for the rider to pass the spot where he stood, and he did not leave his position until the sound of the horse's hoofs—presently quickened to a gallop—had died away in the distance.

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“Could it have been Robinson,” he wondered, “or Fleetmann or Robert Tryon? Or possibly some one of the enemy tipped off by one of these three that he had started for Morristown?”

He untied his horse and mounted, revolving these thoughts in his mind. After all, he reflected, he had no definite reasons for suspecting these three men. But ever since that high-pitched nasal voice had called in the window to Edward and Thomas and him the previous summer he had, in common with his two friends, been obsessed with the idea that these three men would bear watching. The fact that none of them had done anything to confirm their suspicions had not served to make them any the less watchful.

“It’s a queer thing,” John muttered as he turned his horse into the road again and proceeded on his journey. He kept his ears open for sounds of other horsemen, but evidently the one who had passed him back in the woods had far outstripped him, he met none traveling in the opposite direction, and heard nothing of any one following. After an hour and a half he came to the home of the Van Pelts.

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Their house stood far back from the road, and the approach was through an apple orchard. The house was in complete darkness and it suddenly occurred to John that possibly the Van Pelts were not living there any more. He knew that Mr. Van Pelt, a man of nearly sixty, was too old for active soldiering, and could not have joined the army, but he had not had any news of them for over a year, and there was of course the possibility of their having moved away.

He stopped his horse in front of the house, and was preparing to dismount when suddenly a window in the second story opened and a rifle was fired point blank at the young messenger.

John had one foot in the stirrup, and as his horse jumped at the noise of the discharge, he was tripped and thrown violently to the ground. Stunned and startled, he was unable to move or do anything for a moment. Fortunately the bullet had missed him. Whether the horse had been hit or not he could not tell. He heard the frightened animal clattering off through the orchard.

A moment later John had recovered his wits and gained control of himself once more. He

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sprang to his feet, and scurried behind a nearby apple tree for protection.

“Get out of there, you damned Hessian,” shouted an angry voice from the window. And to John’s immense relief he recognized the voice as belonging to Mr. Van Pelt.

“Mr. Van Pelt,” he cried eagerly. “Don’t shoot. Don’t you know me?”

“Who are you?” demanded the irate Mr. Van Pelt, though John was quick to notice that his voice was a trifle milder than it had been. “How do you expect me to know you in the dark?”

“I’m John Stirling.”

“How do I know you’re telling the truth?”

“Let me in and you can look at me.”

“What are you doing here if you are John Stirling?”

“I’m on a mission for General Washington,” said John with a touch of pride in his tone.

“Huh,” grunted Mr. Van Pelt.

“My duties took me this way and I thought I’d stop and rest a little while at your house, if you’ll let me.”

“Are you telling the truth?”

“I swear it,” said John earnestly.

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“Well, you don’t talk like a Hessian anyway,” said Mr. Van Pelt. “I’ll get a light and open the front door. No treachery remember.”

“You can depend upon me,” said John. He could not help but smile a bit at the cross-examination to which he had been subjected.

A moment later a light appeared through the window, and presently John saw it descending the stairs. He stepped out from behind the tree and approached the front door. He heard bolts being slipped back and after a brief delay the door opened on a crack.

“Keep him covered with the rifle, Joan,” he heard Mr. Van Pelt say. “Step up here and let’s have a look at you,” John was ordered.

John mounted the step and stood before the door. Mr. Van Pelt was just inside, holding a tall candle above his head on which reposed a nightcap. He strained his eyes to look at John.

“You say you’re John Stirling?” he inquired.

“I do,” said John. “You needn’t keep that rifle pointing at me, Mrs. Van Pelt. I’m telling the truth.”

“He is, Joan,” exclaimed Mr. Van Pelt sud-

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denly. "Come in, John. Please excuse me for shooting at you, but some of those German butchers called on us early in the evening and when I heard you riding through the orchard I thought of course they were coming back. They stole our horse and all our chickens and I was bound to give them a warm reception this time."

He grasped John by the hand and drew him inside. Mrs. Van Pelt put down the rifle and also greeted John warmly.

"So you're in the army, are you?" she exclaimed.

"Yes," said John.

"What's left of it," said her husband gloomily. "Left college?"

"There's not much college to leave," said John. "There hasn't been for months."

"Well, we're delighted to see you. How long can you stay?"

"A very short while," said John. "I'm on my way to the army at Morristown. I thought I would stop here and rest myself and my horse for a few hours before continuing the rest of the way. I've come from Princeton this afternoon."

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“You must be tired and hungry,” exclaimed Mrs. Van Pelt solicitously. “I’ll get you something to eat and then you can rest.”

“Where’s your horse?” demanded Mr. Van Pelt.

“Bless me,” cried John, “I had forgotten him. Your shot frightened him off.”

“Did I hit him?”

“Oh, I don’t think so.”

“I certainly hope not. Wait a minute until I get a few clothes on and I’ll go round him up for you.”

John protested that he could do that himself, but Mr. Van Pelt would not hear of it. He insisted that the young soldier stay right in the house and get all the rest he could; besides, he said, John would not know his way about the place and might get into trouble.

John’s objections fell on deaf ears, and presently Mr. Van Pelt had sallied forth into the night to find the missing horse. Mrs. Van Pelt ushered John into the kitchen, and in an incredibly short time had prepared a hearty meal for him, to which needless to say he did full justice. As he was finishing Mr. Van Pelt returned with the report that he had located the

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horse, apparently unhurt, and had taken him to a shed a quarter of a mile back of the house in the woods, and tied him there.

“Those Hessians will be back, I’m afraid,” he exclaimed. “If they do come we don’t want them to get your horse.”

“I should say not,” said John anxiously. “I’d be in a pretty fix.”

“I don’t reckon they’ll find him up there in the woods if they do return,” said Mr. Van Pelt. “We don’t want them to find you either.”

“Don’t think of such a thing,” exclaimed Mrs. Van Pelt. “John, if you’ve had all you want to eat, come and let me show you a bed. You’ll need all the rest you can get.”

There was a bedroom on the ground floor of the kitchen, and in a very few minutes John was sound asleep. Mr. Van Pelt had promised to awaken him at six o’clock so that he could be up and on his way early. Personally John had few worries about Hessians. A raiding party no doubt, but it did not seem to him probable that they would remain long in the neighborhood with General Lee’s army encamped only a few short miles away. He fell into a heavy, dreamless sleep, and had not made him-

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self comfortable even to the extent of removing his clothes.

How long he slept he did not know, but it seemed to him that only a few moments had elapsed when he felt himself being rudely shaken. He sat up in bed, dazed.

“What’s the matter?” he demanded.

“Get up. Get up quickly,” said Mrs. Van Pelt agitatedly. “The British are coming.”

CHAPTER VII

A STRANGE HIDING PLACE

JOHN sprang to his feet, thoroughly awake at once.

“Where are they?” he demanded.

“Coming through the orchard,” said Mrs. Van Pelt. “Come with me. You must hide. Hurry!”

John asked no further questions. Mrs. Van Pelt was already passing through the doorway into the kitchen, and he followed close at her heels. She unbolted the back door, and they stepped out. The first faint streaks of dawn were visible in the eastern sky, and a ghostly gray light made it possible for them to distinguish objects with some degree of clearness.

The barn stood a short distance from the rear of the house, and into it Mrs. Van Pelt led the way. John could hear faintly, issuing from the orchard, the shouts and calls of the British soldiers.

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“I hope Mr. Van Pelt doesn’t shoot at them,” he said.

“I hope so too,” said Mrs. Van Pelt.

She walked, and ran, through the barn, past the empty horse stall, and, opening a small door at the rear, stepped out of doors once more. John had to stoop to pass through the doorway, but he was only a step behind his guide. At the rear of the barn stood a haystack. A pitchfork leaned against it, and seizing it in both hands Mrs. Van Pelt began digging furiously into the mound of hay.

“Let me do that,” cried John, quick to understand her purpose.

“No,” she replied shortly. “I can do it better.”

In almost no time she had dug a hole in the side of the mound of hay big enough for a man to crawl into. Then she stood back and looked at John.

Without a word he dropped on all fours, and backed himself into the opening Mrs. Van Pelt had dug.

“Lie down,” she ordered.

He stretched his legs out straight in back of him, and with both hands flat on the ground

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forced himself as far into the haystack as he could.

“That’s enough,” said Mrs. Van Pelt, and immediately she began pitching the hay over the young messenger, which a moment previously she had removed from the stack. It was the work of but a minute to cover him completely.

“Can you breathe?” she inquired in a low voice.

“Fairly well,” John replied. The dust and the particles of hay got up his nose, and half choked him, but still he could breathe.

“There’s only a light covering over your face,” said Mrs. Van Pelt. “Don’t move your head or you’ll disturb it. I’m leaning the pitchfork directly against the spot where you are lying.”

She was gone. A moment later John heard her close the rear door of the barn and then all was silent. He wanted to cough. Every time he attempted to take in a breath he inhaled a quantity of the dust; it irritated his nose, and when he attempted to breathe through his mouth that proved even worse. He was afraid to open his eyes for fear of the dust getting into

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them; then he would have to rub them and the movement of his arms would no doubt dislodge his covering of hay and expose his hiding place.

Some of the hay was damp and he began to feel cold. After a short time his limbs began to get stiff and cramped. The weight of the hay became uncomfortable, and he was thoroughly miserable. All the time, however, his ears were strained for any sounds of the enemy, and his anxiety helped him to some extent to forget his bodily discomforts.

All was silent as the grave. The only sound he heard for what seemed to him to be hours was the cawing of some crows winging their heavy flight overhead, setting out on their daily search for food.

John's position grew more and more cramped as the minutes passed. The British must have gone by this time, he thought, and he even considered forcing his way out of his strange hiding place. In fact it seemed to him that he must get out into the air again where he could breathe freely. But he knew Mrs. Van Pelt would return when the danger had passed, and he resisted such impulses as impracticable. He could feel the letter he was bearing in his in-

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side pocket to General Lee, and the realization that he was the carrier of an important message made him set his teeth and resolve to bear his present discomfort under any and all trials and discomforts. He knew that Edward or Thomas or Samuel Smith, any of his Princeton companions in fact, would hold out against all obstacles and he resolved that he could do no less.

Suddenly he heard the sound of voices.

“Ve vill in der back of der barn look,” John heard a deep guttural voice say, and his heart almost stopped beating. He figured that by now it must be broad daylight, and he felt certain that some one would notice that the hay had been disturbed, and would dig into the side of the stack. He gave himself up for lost.

John could hear people walking about in different directions. Most of the men, however, it seemed to him, were standing directly in front of his hiding place.

“Ve scoured der house clean,” the deep voice said. “Der vas no signs of him dere. Nor of der horse eeder.”

“But,” said a voice, and John almost jumped clear of his place of concealment at the sound

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of it, "I did not catch up to him last night and your men say no one passed this way along the road."

The voice was high-pitched and nasal. John knew the voice, and knew that it belonged to one of three men.

"Dot proves noddings," said the Hessian testily. "He may haf der odder road took."

"There is no other road," said the owner of the nasal voice.

"You are sure den he left Brinceton?"

"Of course I'm sure," cried the other. "I saw him with my own eyes."

"It iss very beculiar," said the Hessian.

"He must be at this house or the one on beyond up the road."

"Den," remarked the Hessian confidently, "it must be der odder von. I do not tink he iss here."

"I am not so sure," said the man with the nasal voice. "Old Van Pelt is a liar and I believe he has seen him in spite of all he says."

"It might be," said the Hessian with a chuckle, "dot if ve stuck Misder Van Peld vit der fork here he might haf somedings more to say for himself."

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“I’d like to stick it clean through him,” cried the other angrily. “Look in that corner,” he called, evidently to one of the members of the searching party.

John scarcely dared to breathe, and yet at the same time he had a burning desire to spring out suddenly and confront his enemies. He realized that it was foolhardy even to think of such a thing and that such a move would mean certain capture, perhaps death. He knew he had no right to risk the message he carried, but the curiosity he had to discover the identity of the owner of the nasal voice made it difficult to resist the impulse.

“Blockheads,” said that person in a tone of disgust. “You’ve let him slip right through your hands.”

“He could not haf come dis vay,” said the Hessian stubbornly, and then, contradicting himself, he continued, “I tink ve vill find him at der odder house.”

“Blah! You fools,” exclaimed his companion in disgust.

Apparently he was convinced, however, that the young messenger was not to be found at

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the Van Pelts', for a moment later John heard him opening the rear door into the barn.

"Come along," he exclaimed to the Hessian.

John heard the Hessian call to his men in German, and presently the sound of retreating footsteps came to his ears, and voices growing fainter as they faded into the distance. For the first time since he had crawled into the hole in the side of the haystack the young soldier felt at ease. His cramps, his aching limbs, his lack of air, all were forgotten as he heard his enemies withdraw. He was certain they would leave the Van Pelt home shortly and looked forward to being released by Mrs. Van Pelt within a very few moments.

"My troubles will soon be over," he muttered to himself, and then he added, "at least for the present."

This pleasing thought had scarcely passed through his mind when he heard a noise that affected him even more than the sound of the Hessians' voices and the high-pitched nasal tones of his unidentified enemy had done.

It was a crackling sound that constantly grew louder. The first instant he heard it he could

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not credit his ears. Then suddenly the faint smell of smoke insinuated itself into his nostrils, and he realized immediately what had happened. The Hessians had set fire to the haystack.

CHAPTER VIII

AT WHITE'S TAVERN

JOHN did not hesitate now. He pushed aside the hay that had covered him, and, wriggling and crawling out of his hiding place, rose to his feet and looked about him. The sun was now well up, and at first, his eyes unaccustomed to the light, John could not make out what was happening.

This condition lasted but a few seconds, however. The haystack already had become a seething, roaring cauldron of fire, and so intense was the heat radiated from it that John was forced to withdraw to a considerable distance. He did not forget the Hessians, however, and sought refuge behind the corn crib which was the furthest distance from the main house of any of the outbuildings. From that point of vantage he watched the fire, in the meantime keeping a watchful eye out for any signs of the enemy.

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Heavy smoke curled up from the burning hay. Flames danced and frolicked about the stack, and the air was filled with sparks. One of them alighted on the corncrib, and before John fairly knew what was happening it too was afire. Would the barn be next, and then the house?

John suddenly realized that it was strange neither Mr. nor Mrs. Van Pelt had appeared. If the Hessians had departed it was not likely that they would remain quietly in the house while their buildings burned. Could it be that anything had happened to prevent their coming to the scene of the fire? Could it be that the Hessians had—? Ugly thoughts arose in John's mind, and he decided to investigate at once. He started for the house.

On the way he took advantage of all the cover available, doing his best to conceal himself from any one who might be watching from the direction of the road. If any one saw him John was not aware of it, and a few moments later he stood before the rear entrance to the house. The door was ajar, and he pushed it open and went in. He halted in the center of the kitchen floor and strained his ears for

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any suspicious sounds. The crackling of the fire could be heard faintly, but within the house silence reigned.

He passed on to the front of the house, and in the front room a sight greeted his eyes that made him stop short and gasp. Mrs. Van Pelt sat bolt upright in one of the chairs, her hands bound tightly to her sides, a gag in her mouth, and a rope wound around her knees and around the chair so that she could not move. John, of course, released her immediately.

“Where’s Mr. Van Pelt?” he demanded.

For a moment she was unable to reply. She stood with her hands to her face, rubbing her jaws vigorously where the gag had bound them.

“I don’t know,” she said finally.

“Did they take him with them?”

“I don’t know,” she repeated, and she seemed dazed.

“Have they all gone?”

She nodded her head in assent. “I think so.”

John waited for no more. He dashed out of the room and up the stairs, bound for a tour of the house. He did not have far to look, for in the first room he entered on the second floor he discovered Mr. Van Pelt. He was lying on

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the bed, gagged and tied hand and foot. A heavy rope, passed over his body and around under the mattress, held him fast.

"Are you hurt?" demanded John when the owner of the house had been released and assisted to his feet.

"Only my feelings," said Mr. Van Pelt with an attempt at a smile.

"Well," exclaimed John, "I'm glad of that. Now, if you'll excuse me for being so abrupt I must tell you that your haystack and corncrib are on fire."

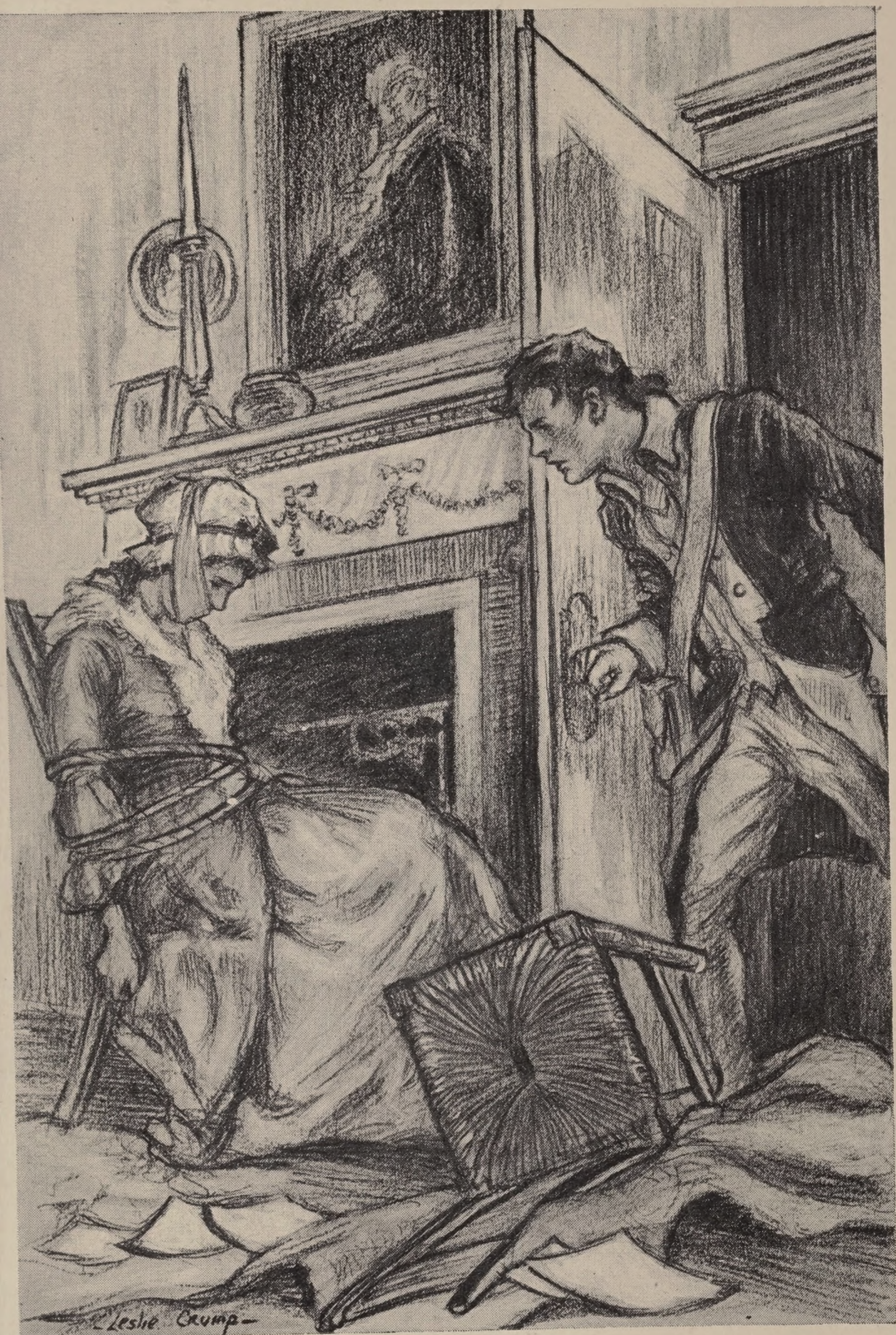
Mr. Van Pelt gave John one look. "The German pigs," he cried, and rushed out of the room.

John followed close after him, but by the time they reached the scene of the fire the haystack had burned almost to the ground, and the corncrib was hopelessly ablaze.

"There's nothing to do about it now," said Mr. Van Pelt bitterly as he watched his property disappearing into smoke.

"How about the barn?" queried John. "Do you think it will catch too?"

"I doubt it," said Mr. Van Pelt. "The wind is blowing in the opposite direction, and it



A SIGHT GREETED HIS EYES THAT MADE HIM STOP AND GASP

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ought to be safe unless those fiends come back and set fire to it themselves."

"Mr. Van Pelt," exclaimed John, "did you see every one in the raiding party?"

"I don't know. I heard them coming through the orchard and I jumped out of bed and started to get into my clothes. I sent Joan down to warn you, and by the time I was nearly dressed they were at the front door. I was going to take a pot shot at them out of the window and rid the world of one or two of the German butchers anyway, but I realized that that would practically be suicide and I thought better of it. I decided I'd try being nice to them, and so I went downstairs and opened the front door. They were hammering on it with their guns and kicking it, and the minute I slid back the bolts they shoved inside, two of them grabbed me before I could do a thing and hustled me upstairs and tied me to the bed where you found me."

"Did you notice a man with a high-pitched, nasal voice?"

"I noticed the voice," said Mr. Van Pelt, "but I didn't see the man. One of the Hessians was asking me questions, and a man with a voice

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like that stood outside the door and directed him what to ask. I don't know why he didn't come in."

"Did his voice sound at all familiar to you?"

"I don't know that it did," said Mr. Van Pelt after a moment's consideration. "It was a queer voice all right."

"Somebody with that kind of a queer voice is my worst enemy, I'm afraid," said John. "I wonder if he stayed outside the room for fear you'd recognize him."

"I don't know," said Mr. Van Pelt slowly. "I don't recollect any one with a voice like that, and yet"—he hesitated—"now that you speak of it, it does seem vaguely familiar somehow."

"I wonder if Mrs. Van Pelt saw the owner of the voice," said John. "I'd like to get a description of him."

"Well, let's go ask her," said Mr. Van Pelt. "There's nothing we can do here." He gazed sadly at what remained of his corncrib and haystack, now little more than smoldering ruins. They turned and retraced their steps to the house.

Mrs. Van Pelt had not caught a glimpse of

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the man with the nasal voice. She had not even heard him talk. When she had returned to the house after concealing John in the haystack two burly Hessian troopers had seized her, dragged her into the front room, tied and gagged her without any ado and left her there. Evidently the solution of the mystery was not to be found at the home of the Van Pelts that day.

John was for riding on to Morristown immediately. Mr. and Mrs. Van Pelt would not hear of it, however. It involved too great a risk, they insisted. If one party of Hessians was in the neighborhood, why was it not reasonable to suppose that there were others abroad as well? Evidently they were on the lookout for John, and to attempt to proceed on his journey in broad daylight meant almost certain capture to their way of thinking.

“Wait till nightfall,” begged Mrs. Van Pelt. “It’s better to get there twelve hours later than not to get there at all.”

This argument was unanswerable, and reluctantly John gave in. It did not seem wise for him to remain in the house, however, for

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there was always the chance that the Hessians would return, particularly as they were doomed to disappointment in their search for the young messenger at the next house up the road. He therefore retired to the shed, back in the woods where Mr. Van Pelt had taken his horse. There he passed the day, most of it in sleeping, while the Van Pelts watched for any reappearance of the enemy, ready to warn their young friend at the first sign of danger.

But nothing happened to disturb his solitude, and as evening approached Mr. Van Pelt returned to the shed with a bag of oats for the horse and a package of food for John.

"I have news for you," he announced.

"What is it?" demanded John eagerly.

"A friend of ours, Robert Nostrand from Basking Ridge, stopped at the house an hour ago and said that General Lee is not with the army at Morristown, but staying at White's Tavern at Basking Ridge. Your journey is shortened by several miles."

"You are sure he is there?"

"Robert Nostrand said he knew it. Mrs. White herself, owner of the house, told him."

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“Did Mr. Nostrand see anything of the British and Hessians in the neighborhood?”

“Not hide nor hair. Possibly they have been frightened off by the close proximity of our army.”

“Good,” exclaimed John. “I must be off at once.”

Mr. Van Pelt gave John careful instructions about the road he was to follow. He knew of a back road, somewhat longer than the main highway, but much safer, he believed, and in his opinion one that on that account might not require as much time to traverse. He described it in minute detail to John until he felt certain the young soldier had it firmly fixed in his mind.

“Now you can be off,” he exclaimed.

“Mr. Van Pelt,” said John, “I can’t thank you enough for the kindness you have shown me, and I can’t begin to tell you how sorry I am to have been the cause of so much trouble.”

“Don’t give it a thought,” said Mr. Van Pelt warmly. “If you really have been the cause of any trouble, and I’m not sure but that

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we should have encountered it anyway, it is all in a good cause and we are proud to have been of some service."

"You are very good," said John simply. "Please say good-by to Mrs. Van Pelt for me and thank her too." He held out his hand. "Good-by," he said.

"Good-by, and good luck," exclaimed Mr. Van Pelt. "Stop and see us on the way back if you have a chance."

They shook hands. A moment later John had mounted his horse and was threading his way carefully among the trees. He could see practically nothing and was obliged to give the horse his head, trusting mainly to the animal's instinct to follow the narrow trail through the woods. A half hour later he emerged upon the road which Mr. Van Pelt had described to him. This road itself was scarcely more than a trail; it was dotted with holes, lined with ruts, and frequently obstructed by fallen branches and in some cases whole trees.

Progress on such a thoroughfare was difficult and slow, but John had expected this and it did not worry him. His main concern was to find the narrow trail which Mr. Van Pelt had

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warned him branched off the road he was following some five miles from the place where he had emerged from the woods. He had been instructed to take this left-hand fork, and as Mr. Van Pelt had described it as being difficult to recognize, he kept a sharp watch for it. Twice he attempted to turn off at places which seemed to answer the description he had received and both times he had found himself mistaken.

Finally he became actually worried, and although for a time he would not admit it to himself, the moment came when he was obliged to confess that he had lost his way. Anger and despondency alternated in his mind as he realized this condition of affairs. What was he to do? His first impulse was to ride madly on without any clear idea of where he was bound, his desire being to get somewhere, no matter where it was. Sober second thought convinced him of the folly of such a proceeding, and he reined in his horse and sat there silently in the darkness, trying to think out some plan of action. If only he could find a house with somebody in it of whom to ask questions. But he had seen no sign of a habitation of any kind,

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and he remembered that Mr. Van Pelt had told him that no one lived along this road.

A feeling of desperation seized him. He had been seriously delayed already in his progress to Morristown, and in case he was obliged to wait until morning before being able to find his way that would mean travel by daylight and increased danger of capture.

“It just can’t be,” cried John aloud.

He turned his horse’s head around and started back over the way he had come. He strained his eyes, striving to pierce the darkness and discover the road he was to take. He kept his horse at a walk, and several times dismounted, and on foot investigated leads which seemed promising. But with no success.

“It must be farther along,” he muttered, and again he walked his horse in the direction he had taken originally.

How many hours had elapsed since he had taken leave of Mr. Van Pelt he did not know, but he felt certain that dawn could not be long delayed, and every hour was precious. He wished he had kept to the main road and accepted the risk of capture. At least he would not have lost his way if he had followed that

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plan, and he began to feel that Mr. Van Pelt was responsible for his present predicament. This feeling he immediately rejected as unwarranted, but he wanted to blame somebody.

Then, suddenly, he spied a narrow opening in the trees on the left hand side of the road. Instinctively he felt that this was the place he had been looking for for so many long hours, and turning his horse aside he urged him forward at a trot. To his great joy the road did not come to an end after a short distance as the others had done, and he felt certain that at last he had found the route which had so persistently eluded him most of the night.

“About five miles of this road,” he repeated to himself, remembering Mr. Van Pelt’s instructions. “Then I reach the main road and *White’s Tavern* is only a mile distant.”

He was soon obliged to slow his horse to a walk again, but he worried little now. He knew he was on the right road and that it would not be long before he came to his destination. Meanwhile the road wound up and down hill, now and again emerging from the woods into a clearing. The one thing that bothered him was the fact that the faint glow in the eastern

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sky proclaimed the near approach of sunrise.

When he came to the main road he dismounted and tied his horse in a patch of woods two hundred yards distant from the highway. It was light enough now for him to see his way with reasonable ease and to observe the approach of an enemy in time to conceal himself. This latter reason mainly accounted for his having decided to make the last stage of the journey on foot.

Many times he was disturbed by the fear that Mr. Nostrand's information had been incorrect and that he would not find General Lee at the tavern at all. His anxiety increased as he drew nearer, and when the small white inn appeared among the trees ahead he was so overcome by nervousness that he was obliged to sit down beside the road for several moments to quiet his nerves.

This feeling did not last long, however, and presently he was once again walking along the road towards the tavern. The top of the sun was now visible over the rim of the horizon and to all intents and purposes it was as light as day. John wondered what he would say to the guards posted about the inn. He wondered

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if he would have any difficulty convincing them that his mission was a proper one.

This question was soon answered, for as he turned aside from the road to approach the inn he was challenged. A soldier in the buff and blue of the Continental Army stepped out from behind a tree and leveled his rifle at John.

"I have a message for General Lee," said John.

"From whom?"

"General Washington."

The sentry was impressed by this, and lowered his gun. He scrutinized John carefully.

"Who told you General Lee was here?" he inquired finally.

"A gentleman who lives in the neighborhood," said John. "I hope his information is correct, for I have ridden far,—all the way from Princeton,—and I understand the message is an urgent one."

"Come with me," said the sentry abruptly, and turned upon his heel and walked towards the inn without another word. John, of course, followed close behind.

The sentry did not approach the front door, but turning the corner of the house proceeded

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around to the rear. The inn faced west so that the early morning rays of the sun were shining on the back, and there John found himself in the midst of a group of soldiers, six in all. They seemed to be in the act of making their morning toilets, each one awaiting his turn at a basin of water, which was being refilled from a rain barrel after each had washed his face and hands.

“The barrel had ice on it this morning,” John heard one of them say as he and his conductor came around the corner.

“Well, Charley,” exclaimed one of the soldiers, catching sight of John and his escort, “who have you there, a prisoner? A spy rather, I reckon, for he wears the coat belonging to our uniform.”

“He’s just here from Princeton with a message from General Washington for General Lee,” said the sentry who had brought John in.

“And I suppose his own name is John Adams,” exclaimed the soldier, which remark was greeted with a noisy laugh from all the others, who evidently looked upon the speaker as a wit.

John, however, was irritated. He did not

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relish the idea of being the butt of a silly joke. He could not help but feel that it was because of his youth that they dared to laugh at him, and he was particularly sensitive on that point. What if he was only seventeen, he had been chosen as the bearer of an extremely important message, and that proved that his superiors had confidence in him and took him seriously. It made him angry to be laughed at by a lot of common soldiers.

“You can apologize for that remark now,” he said, edging a trifle closed to the speaker, “or wait until I have delivered my message and I’ll make you apologize.”

“Ho ho, a spunky little fellow,” cried the soldier boisterously.

“You—” John began, but got no further.

The sound of hoofs clattering up the road smote upon their ears. The back door of the inn was thrown suddenly open, and a woman appeared, a wooden spoon in one hand, a salt shaker in the other. She was pale and wild-eyed.

“The redcoats are here,” she cried in a terrified voice.

CHAPTER IX

DISCOURAGEMENT

FROM the noise and confusion originating from the front of the tavern it sounded to John as if General Howe and half his British army must have arrived. He stood rooted to the ground, his mind a complete blank, unable to think, unable to move.

Shouts reached his ears, commands, mingled with the confused murmur of voices. Doors slammed inside the inn, he heard people running up and downstairs, and a table was overturned. It seemed to John as if he were in the midst of a horrible nightmare, wishing to do something but powerless to stir. And yet through it all he was aware of the cawing of a crow flying low overhead, oblivious of the fact that below him was being enacted a scene in the great drama whose conclusion was to see the Thirteen Colonies free, and forming the nucleus of the great United States of America. It is

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curious how a trivial thing will sometimes impress itself upon the mind, so strongly perhaps that it seems to supersede and crowd out other things of far more importance. So long as he lived John never heard the cawing of a crow without its recalling to his mind that early morning scene at Basking Ridge, at *White's Tavern*.

“Run! Run for your lives!” he heard one of his companions cry, and suddenly he was galvanized into action.

The ability to think did not seem to come back with the return of his power of locomotion, however, for without a thought he did as directed, and turned and ran. Like a pack of frightened rabbits he and his newly acquired companions darted across the narrow expanse of lawn in back of the inn and dove into the bushes bordering it on the opposite side.

The message in his pocket was forgotten,—though obviously it would have been out of the question to deliver it at any time since he had arrived,—everything was forgotten except the fact that the British were there and unless he made haste he would fall into their hands.

He ran and ran. He forgot the other sol-

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diers, and presently found himself alone, and still running. His breath would not hold out forever, however, and presently he was obliged to halt from sheer exhaustion. So far as he could tell he was entirely alone, and he sank down in the midst of a clump of cedar trees to regain his wind and collect his thoughts.

“I’m a fool,” he exclaimed bitterly as soon as he was able to think the least bit clearly.

A moment later he began to wonder if he was such a fool after all. Certainly there had not been time for him to deliver his message before the redcoats had arrived, and after they had arrived what was there that he could have done? One boy could not have driven them off. If he had shown fight the outcome would assuredly have been capture or death. Perhaps running away was really the only thing to have done.

This thought made John feel more comfortable in his mind, though the recollection of his fright and panic did not tend to produce anything but a feeling of chagrin.

“Well,” he sighed, “what next? Forget what has passed.”

He rose to his feet, and as he did so he heard

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the sound of a company of horse approaching. For the first time John realized that the cluster of trees in which he was hiding was only a few yards back from the road. He sank to his knees and peered out cautiously.

Presently the band hove in sight. A man in the uniform of a British colonel rode at the head of a detachment of dragoons, in scarlet coats and white breeches. In the center was a man on a bay horse, bareheaded, slippers on his feet, his back covered merely by a blanket coat. He was a large man of extremely plain countenance and though John had never seen him before he recognized him at once from descriptions he had received and knew him for General Charles Henry Lee.

The dragoons were laughing and talking and seemed in fine fettle.

“Why not?” thought John. “They have captured Washington’s chief aide.”

He raised his rifle and took careful aim at the cavalryman who was bringing up the rear. Then a feeling of depression suddenly swept over him. “What’s the use?” he muttered, and sinking back onto the ground he cried like a baby.

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He was tired and disappointed and discouraged. The journey from Princeton had been a difficult one, and the strain on the nerves of a boy of seventeen, unused to the perils and hardships of war, had been heavy. If his mission had ended successfully that would have been one thing, but to have failed, and particularly to have failed by so narrow a margin, was discouraging to say the least.

It was not long before John regained control of himself, however, though some time elapsed before he attempted to stir from the spot where he was seated. He had no clear idea of what he would do next, and his plans for the immediate future were exceedingly vague. In a general way he realized that he should return to Princeton and report, and with this thought in the back of his head he rose to his feet.

At first it occurred to him to return to the inn. That would be safe enough, he felt, for it did not seem likely that the British would remain there any longer than was necessary. The Continental Army at Morristown was only a few miles away, they would soon be apprised of General Lee's capture and it would not be

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safe for any small band of the enemy to remain in the neighborhood.

“But what’s the point of going back to the inn?” John asked himself. He decided that the place for him was Princeton, and at the earliest possible moment.

With this purpose firmly fixed in his mind he made his way to the road and turned in the direction from which he had come. He made no attempt at concealment now. His spirits were so low that he did not care very much what happened to him, and in addition he had a strong feeling of confidence that none of the enemy was any longer in that vicinity. Whether his surmise was correct or not the fact remains that he did not meet a living soul along the road. He found his horse right where he had left him, and was presently in the saddle again, headed back towards Princeton.

CHAPTER X

BY THE DELAWARE

ONCE started on his return journey, John made all speed possible. He stuck boldly to the main road with no effort at concealment, his one idea being haste. He rode past the Van Pelts' house, and though he was strongly tempted to stop for a short time and recount his adventures to them, he checked this impulse and hurried on.

Arrived at Princeton, he found a great change in the state of affairs. Nassau Hall was full of soldiers, soldiers hung about the *Hudibras* and *The Sign of the College*, loitered about the streets, and were quartered in many of the houses of the village.

One of the first persons John met as he rode up the King's Highway into Princeton was Professor Houston.

"Well, John," he cried, catching sight of the young soldier.

John drew rein and dismounted, holding the

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horse's bridle in his hand. "Is Captain Robbins here?" he inquired.

"No," said Professor Houston, "he is not. He is safely across the Delaware, I expect,—with what is left of the army."

"Has General Washington retreated that far?" exclaimed John in amazement.

"He has indeed," said Professor Houston, shaking his head sadly. "There is fear even that Philadelphia, our capital, may fall into the hands of the enemy. Matters are in a sorry state, John."

"So it would seem," said John. "Edward and Thomas are with General Washington, I presume."

"Yes, and your friend Samuel Smith too. Lord Stirling¹ is in command of our army here, but how long he will be able to remain is a problem. Retreat seems to be the order of the day for our armies now. 'Tis said General Washington has stated that he will retreat behind the Susquehanna River if necessary, and if forced to it, even behind the Allegheny Mountains."

¹ Lord Stirling was captured by the British in the Battle of Long Island, August 27, 1776. Within a month he was exchanged for Governor Brown of Providence Island.

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“He is now across the Delaware?”

“Crossed four days ago, I understand.”

“They must have left here the day I started for Morristown,” said John. “Things are happening thick and fast.”

“Nothing is happening in the College of New Jersey,” said Professor Houston. “A handful of students only are left, those who for one reason or another are unable to bear arms. We plan to make a pretext of holding classes, but it can be little more than make-believe. The college is now a barracks, as you will soon see for yourself.”

“I’d better report, I reckon,” said John, and took leave of his former instructor.

Nassau Hall was now a barracks as Professor Houston had said. It swarmed with soldiers, and was the scene of hustling activity. In his very own room John discovered a dozen infantrymen sitting around on the floor cleaning their rifles. He did not undertake to explain to them that he had once lived there, however, but kept on in quest of some officer to whom he could report, and who would instruct him what to do next. Besides he had no interest in the room now. All his meager

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stock of belongings had been removed previous to his enlistment and stored at the home of Mrs. Leonard in the village.

Presently John found an officer and succeeded in getting his attention for a moment.

“Wait here,” the officer told him after he had heard a few words of the young messenger’s story. John waited, and presently the officer appeared in the doorway of a nearby room and told him to come in. A moment later John was ushered into the presence of General Lord Stirling himself.

The general had not previously been apprised of General Lee’s capture and urged John to give him the fullest details at his command. General Stirling listened attentively, his face showing no sign of emotion, but when John had finished his story he turned to his aide, standing beside him.

“A stupid performance on Lee’s part,” he remarked dryly.

The aide shrugged his shoulders and said nothing.

“However,” continued General Stirling, “I believe it will all work out for the best. Israel Putnam will succeed to his command, and

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so we shall at least have a man who will obey orders and upon whom we can count.”

He turned to John. “Thank you for your report,” he said.

John was afraid the general was going to take him to task for not having delivered the message, but neither by word or deed did he show any sign of displeasure. He seemed to appreciate the fact that the young messenger had done his best, and had failed, not because of any fault of his own, but rather through force of circumstances.

“You had better refresh yourself and then rejoin your regiment on the right bank of the Delaware,” he said.

John saluted and withdrew. His horse was tethered outside and he mounted it and rode to the home of Mrs. Leonard in the village. He put the horse in her stable and then presented himself at the door of the house. Mrs. Leonard was delighted to see him and welcomed him cordially. She had her colored servant bring in water from the well so that John could bathe, provided him with a change of undergarments, and supplied him with a bountiful repast. She also wanted him to sleep for a

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time, but while he was extremely weary he felt that it was his duty to hasten back to his regiment as fast as he could.

It was late afternoon when he approached the banks of the Delaware River. He reached the river some five miles above Trenton, and although he had been warned that the neighborhood was infested by British and Hessians, he had seen no sign of them. He left his horse at the home of Mr. Laning, an ardent patriot, and a friend of Mr Nash, Edward's father.

"I suppose I'll never see him again," said John, "but I can't get him across the river."

"I'm not sure that you can get across yourself," said Mr. Laning. "Washington's men have taken every boat to be had."

John's face fell. "But I must get across," he exclaimed. "I have a report to make and I must get back to my regiment."

"Can you manage a canoe?"

John looked at the river. The current was swift and the stream was filled with floating ice.

"I can manage a canoe, but I'm not sure that I can manage one in water like that."

"There is a canoe in the hayloft of the barn,"

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said Mr. Laning. "The soldiers did not take it, because they thought it of no value with the ice in the river. Besides, it is leaky, but it is all I can offer. You are welcome to it if you want it."

John considered a moment. "I suppose it's my only chance," he said, half to himself. "I guess I'll have to try it."

"Come up to the barn with me then," said Mr. Laning, "and help me carry it down. I'll fetch a paddle from the house."

A few moments later the canoe was resting on the river bank, and John stood beside it, paddle in hand. Mr. Laning looked at him curiously.

"Not very good weather for canoeing," he remarked.

"No," said John soberly.

If he had any doubts about attempting the dangerous passage, however, they were soon dispelled. Down the road towards the house came a detachment of Hessians, an officer at their head, the men marching two abreast. John took one look at them, flung his rifle into the canoe, pushed the frail birch bark craft

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down to the water's edge, got aboard and pushed off.

The current caught the bow of the canoe and swung it around. He dug his paddle deep into the water and paddled furiously. The canoe shot out into the stream and the battle with the ice and the current was on in earnest. John gave one quick glance over his shoulder. The Hessians had spied him, broken ranks, and were running at top speed towards the river. He could hear them calling to him, presumably to return and give himself up, though the German words had no definite meaning for him.

He exerted every ounce of strength he possessed, and the distance between him and the shore lengthened rapidly, although the current was constantly bearing the light boat downstream. A bullet kicked up a jet of water close beside him and he heard the sound of a rifle shot from the shore. Another shot followed close after, then another and another. It seemed to John as if bullets rained all about him. His arms ached and his breath was almost gone, but he worked as he had never worked before, paddling with all his strength,

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resting on one knee and putting all the weight of his body behind each stroke.

The shouts of the Hessians grew fainter, and the rifle shots sounded less frequently. John decided he was getting out of range and began to feel easier. He relaxed his efforts for a moment and a rifle ball suddenly struck the main thwart of the canoe, nearly upsetting it. The thwart was splintered, causing John to fear that the canoe might buckle and collapse. But there was only one thing to do, and that was to paddle with all his might and main.

As he approached the center of the stream the current grew swifter and the ice increased. Huge blocks of it came careening along, rolling and tumbling first one way then the other, with every lurch they made threatening the safety, and even the existence of the tiny craft. The water was rough and the canoe shipped water constantly. The waves retarded its progress, tossed it about like a billet of wood, swung it this way and that, seemingly doing everything in their power to make the voyage dangerous and difficult.

It required all of John's watermanship to

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avoid the ice and make progress towards the west shore. Darkness too was coming on rapidly, making it increasingly difficult to see the floating ice, for many of the cakes scarcely showed above the surface and were nearly of the color of the water.

But the Hessians were not shooting at him any more and he was drawing closer and closer to the opposite shore. He could now make out the figure of a man standing on the bank, a rifle over his shoulder. "A sentry," John decided.

The current had carried him a half mile downstream from the spot whence he had embarked. The worst of the crossing was past, however, and John pointed the nose of the canoe for the lea side of the tiny point of land on which the sentry was standing. And as he approached safety, with the Hessians far out of range and the worst danger from the ice floes behind him, he wondered if he were going to be able to reach shore. His arms were so tired they did not seem to be any longer a part of him. His muscles were so sore and sensitive that it seemed to John that even

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thinking about them made them ache. His legs were knotted with cramps and the palms of his hands blistered, raw and bleeding.

“But it’s only a few hundred feet more,” he told himself, and clenched his teeth for the final effort.

The sentry had been standing quietly on the shore watching him. Suddenly he swung the butt of his rifle to his shoulder, took aim at John and fired point blank.

John was not so frightened by this unexpected action as he was amazed. His astonishment was so great that he almost dropped his paddle. The bullet whined past his head and struck the water behind him with a sharp smack. In the fast-gathering darkness he could see the sentry reloading his rifle in feverish haste, presumably for another shot.

“Hallo, there,” shouted John. “What’s the matter with you?”

The soldier on the shore continued his loading, John’s words seeming to hasten his efforts rather than to retard them.

“What’s the matter with you?” shouted John again. “I’m one of your own men.”

If the soldier heard he gave no sign, and

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for an instant John wondered if the British had succeeded in crossing the river and were now in possession of the right bank. Was this soldier who was firing at him one of the enemy? Could it be that he was approaching an enemy encampment? This doubt was soon set at rest, however, for several soldiers, attracted by the sound of the shot, came running down to the bank, and, difficult as it was to see, John could easily make out their Continental uniforms.

Meanwhile the sentry had reloaded his gun and was raising it to his shoulder.

“Don’t shoot,” shouted John. “I’m in the Jersey militia.”

The soldiers attracted to the scene arrived at the shore at that moment, and whether it was his own call or something one of them said John did not know for a long time, but at any rate the man lowered his rifle and let the butt of it fall to the ground beside him.

John had forgotten his sore hands and muscles now. He dug his paddle into the water, and a few moments later ran the prow of the canoe up on a pebbly beach. Two of the soldiers were waiting for him and held the canoe

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while they assisted him ashore. The sentry, however, had not moved from his original position a few yards distant, and John's first act after stepping ashore and securing his rifle was to hasten towards him.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded angrily. "What do you think you are doing?"

"I thought you were a redcoat," said the man sullenly. His voice was high-pitched, nasal and rasping.

John took a step closer and peered into his face.

It was Robinson, ex-steward of The College of New Jersey.

CHAPTER XI

IN CAMP

FOR a moment John was so angry he was scarcely able to speak. He spluttered and choked, swallowed hard and swallowed once again. He shook his fist in Robinson's face, while his own countenance grew fiery red, and his eyes snapped.

"You, you, you—" he gasped finally. He was unable to complete the sentence.

"I'm sorry," said Robinson in his high-pitched nasal voice. "I made a mistake and I apologize."

"You certainly did make a mistake," cried John angrily.

"In the dusk I thought your coat was red," said Robinson.

"You thought one of the British would paddle straight across the river into the hands of the enemy, I suppose," said John. "You think that seems plausible, do you?"

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"I told you I made a mistake," Robinson insisted. "I also said I was sorry and I don't intend to repeat."

"Come along," one of the soldiers urged John. "You can settle with him later."

"I'll see you later all right," said John to the ex-steward. "No one need worry about that."

He turned away and followed the soldiers through the woods towards the camp.

"You knew him before?" one of them asked.

"I did," said John shortly.

"You don't seem to like him very well," and the man chuckled softly.

"Huh."

John offered to say nothing more, and they proceeded in silence to the spot where the camp was located. The camp fires were lighted, and the soldiers gathered about them were heaping on the wood, and drawing as close to them as they could in order to gain the benefit of the warmth. The flickering, dancing flames showed most of the men to be poorly clad, many lacked coats, many were in rags, and all of them seemed to be shivering and cold.

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After a considerable search John found Captain Robbins and made his report. The officer listened closely to every word and then plied the young soldier with numerous questions. When John had answered them all to the best of his ability Captain Robbins dismissed him, and directed him to the spot where his regiment was located.

Edward, Thomas and Samuel Smith were huddled together over a fire, eating their supper. John recognized them all in the firelight before he himself was visible, and walking up quietly behind them he accosted them suddenly, in a high-pitched nasal voice.

“And probably hang for it too, you scurvy young rebels.”

His three friends jumped as if a swarm of bees had suddenly appeared amongst them. They were not slow, however, in recognizing the speaker.

“John,” they cried in chorus, and sprang upon him joyously.

When the violence of their greeting had subsided they invited him to share their meal with them.

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“Well, I should say so,” exclaimed John. “I’ve had no food since leaving Mrs. Leonard’s house in Princeton this morning.”

This remark called forth groans from his companions.

“What’s the matter?” demanded John in surprise. “Mrs. Leonard has excellent food. Why should you groan?”

“That’s just the trouble,” said Edward. “The thought of her food and the contrast with our poor fare is enough to make any one groan.”

“You are complainers,” said John.

“Not really,” exclaimed Samuel Smith hastily. “The rations are scanty and poor though. We who have been in the army for only a few days do not complain much, but most of the soldiers are in a dreadful state of mind. They’re cold, and they’re hungry, and they’re down-hearted and discouraged and things are in a sad state.” He raised his arms above his head and shrugged his massive shoulders.

“Yes,” said Edward, “and the term of enlistment of most of the men expires December thirty-first. We shall soon have no army left.”

“I heard some good news this afternoon,

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though," Thomas exclaimed, "and that is that General Mifflin is to join us presently with over two thousand of the Pennsylvania militia."

"What good are militia against British regulars?" demanded Edward despondently.

"Come, come," urged Samuel Smith, "this is no way to welcome John back. He'll think we are as discouraged as the majority of the others. Give him some of that food, Edward, and then we'll get him to relate the story of his trip to Morristown."

"First let me ask a question," said John. "Have Fleetmann and Arthur Tryon and Robinson been here all the time I have been away?"

"Why do you ask that?" inquired Thomas, and he and Edward and Samuel Smith exchanged glances.

"Answer my question first," said John.

"Well," said Thomas, "Arthur has been around all the time, but we haven't seen the other two."

"Thanks," said John. "Now I'll tell my story."

Samuel Smith heaped more wood upon the fire, the four soldiers unrolled the blankets from their packs and, wrapped close in them, sat in a

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circle on the ground while John told the story of his journey.

His three companions listened with the closest attention, and when he related the incident of his hiding in the haystack and hearing the familiar voice they leaned forward with one accord so as not to miss a word of the narrative. No one interrupted, however, or made any comment until he had entirely completed his tale. The story of Robinson's firing at him made them all draw in their breath involuntarily. For a moment they sat in silence.

"It couldn't have been Robinson at the Van Pelts'," said Thomas finally. "It must have been Fleetmann. He's the man we want."

"How do you know?" demanded Edward.

"Well," said Thomas, "if it was Robinson how could he have got back here so soon?"

"John got back, didn't he?" Edward inquired.

"But Robinson must have been here some time ahead of him," said Thomas. "How could he have made the trip so much faster than John?"

"I went to Basking Ridge," said John. "Maybe he didn't."

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“Exactly,” Edward exclaimed. “That would explain it.”

“Perhaps you’re right,” Thomas admitted. “You seem to think so anyway, don’t you, John?”

“You say Arthur Tryon has been here all the time?” John inquired. “If that is the case I guess we can eliminate him, so that it must have been either Fleetmann or Robinson. The man beside the haystack said he had seen me ride out of Princeton, and I saw Arthur and Robinson and Fleetmann, all three of them, just as I was leaving. If Arthur was here all the time he couldn’t have been at the Van Pelts’, so it must have been one of the other two.”

“All of which sounds reasonable,” exclaimed Samuel Smith, stretching his fingers out towards the fire, which had died down to a bed of glowing coals.

“What are we going to do about it?” said Edward.

“Just what we’ve been doing,” said Samuel Smith. “Sit tight, say nothing and keep our eyes and ears wide open.”

“Neither one of them has done anything to

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injure the army as yet," said Thomas. "At least as far as we know."

"Capturing me and my message would be no loss, I take it," said John with a laugh. "You are very complimentary, Thomas."

"You know what I meant," said Thomas hastily.

"Surely I do," said John. "But simply because neither one of them has done anything so far doesn't mean much. Perhaps the proper time has not yet arrived."

"Well, I'll tell you," Edward began when Samuel Smith uttered a sharp hiss of warning. Some one was approaching the fire.

The newcomer proved to be Arthur Tryon, who until a few moments previous had been an object of grave suspicion along with Fleetmann and Robinson.

"Ho there, John," he exclaimed. "Captain Robbins told me you were back and I thought I'd come and see if you have any news of Princeton."

"Not a great deal," said John. "I was there only a short time, but long enough, I will admit, to observe that great changes have taken

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place in the past week. One would scarcely think a college had ever been located there.”

“Lord Stirling is there with a detachment, isn’t he?” asked Arthur.

“Yes,” said John.

“The town is swarming with soldiers, I imagine.”

“Crowded with them,” said John.

“They’ll soon be joining us, I suppose?” said Arthur. “That’s what we’re all hoping anyway.”

He sat down on a log alongside Samuel Smith and rubbed the palms of his hands together over the coals. He was a black-haired, black-eyed young man, with a swarthy complexion, unusually white teeth, and extraordinarily heavy wrists and ankles. His neck was short and set close upon his shoulders, giving the impression of great physical strength.

“I don’t know,” said John. “I had a talk with Lord Stirling, but he didn’t consult me about his plans for the future.”

“Naturally not,” said Arthur laughingly.

“John had quite an exciting trip to Morristown,” said Edward.

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“I didn’t know that,” said Arthur. “Tell me about it. It’s pretty country up that way, isn’t it?”

“None prettier in the colonies,” said John, and then he repeated the main features of his journey to Arthur, who was greatly astonished to hear of General Lee’s capture.

“What a blow,” he exclaimed. “I suppose General Putnam will succeed to his command.”

“So Lord Stirling thought,” said John. “He regards him highly, I think, from the way he spoke of him.”

“A fine man, I guess,” said Arthur. “We can count on him joining us soon, I’m sure. We may have an army here yet.”

He rose from his seat on the log, said good night and presently the four friends were left together once more.

“What’s the matter, Samuel?” Edward demanded of Samuel Smith, who had not spoken a word while Arthur Tryon had been with them, and who now sat in silence, huddled in his blanket, his chin close upon his chest.

“I was just thinking,” he said. “Trying to decide whether you ought to have asked John

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to tell Arthur about his trip. We've all been rather suspicious of him, you know."

"But surely you suspect him no longer, do you?" Edward exclaimed in surprise. "I thought we had definitely agreed that his innocence had been established."

"I know," Samuel Smith agreed, "you are quite right. I myself am convinced that our suspicions of him were unfounded, but we did suspect him so recently that I suppose I can't get used to regarding him in any other light. I do believe, however, that it is a poor plan to talk very much before any one."

"I agree with that," exclaimed Edward, "and I admit I had no business to ask John to tell his story."

"The fault was mine for telling it," said John. "I could have declined without great difficulty."

"Forget it," Samuel Smith advised. "Let's get some sleep."

CHAPTER XII

BY THE RIVER

Two days later John and Edward were down by the river. It was a cold day, no wind was blowing, and the air was bracing and clear. The two boys had some free time in the afternoon and were employing it in a stroll along the shore.

“I had a curious experience this morning,” said Edward. “I was walking along in back of headquarters and I saw a fellow ahead of me I thought was Arthur Tryon. In fact I was sure of it, and I hurried to catch up with him, and when I did overtake him I gave him a rousing slap on the back.”

Edward ceased speaking and began to laugh.

“Well?” John demanded.

“It wasn’t Arthur at all,” said Edward. “The man faced around and I discovered it to be some one I had never seen before. But

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I give you my word he looked enough like Arthur to be his twin."

"I've done things like that," said John, "and I don't think there is anything makes one feel so foolish."

"Nothing," Edward agreed. "I just felt kind of flat and I was so embarrassed I could scarcely apologize."

"Do you know who the man is?"

"I have no idea."

"We'll have to ask Arthur about it," said John with a laugh, and then the smile suddenly died on his lips and he gripped his companion fiercely by the wrist, and drew him behind a group of cedar trees.

"What's the matter?" demanded Edward.

"Look!"

John pointed towards the river. Around a point of land appeared a rowboat manned by a single oarsman. He was rowing upstream, and every few strokes he stopped and rested on his oars, while he glanced about him furtively. The two boys watched him breathlessly, not daring to speak and afraid to move lest the oarsman discover them. After a moment he dipped his oars into the water again, and

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with a few powerful strokes sent the flat-bot-tomed boat skimming over the river.

Presently he stopped again and glanced about him in all directions. Then, as before, he resumed his rowing, and this time he kept at it, and he worked hard. Under the impulse of his rhythmic strokes the boat flew over the water and presently was lost to sight behind a jut of land farther up the river.

Then, and then only, did John and Edward dare to move. Still without saying anything, but by common consent, they left their place of concealment and ran at top speed towards the point behind which the boat had disappeared. As they neared the spot they slackened their pace, and, crouching low like Indians, they skulked along, keeping every bit of cover between them and the river. Finally they reached their destination, and, hiding behind a large buttonwood tree, they peered around the trunk, out over the river.

“There he goes,” whispered Edward.

The oarsman was still urging his craft upstream, still hugging the shore.

Suddenly the boat's course was changed. It turned sharply and started straight across the

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river. John and Edward both gasped involuntarily at this maneuver, and then they turned and looked each other solemnly in the eye.

“Fleetmann,” said Edward in a low voice.

“What’s he doing, sneaking off like this?” demanded John.

On their way back to camp the two boys met Robinson, the ex-steward, one of their suspects, although after seeing Fleetmann start across the river in such a mysterious manner they had all but decided that after all he was the man for them to watch.

John had not forgotten Robinson’s firing at him when he was approaching the Pennsylvania shore in the canoe, however. In fact he had been seeking an opportunity to talk with him about it, but previous to this moment had not been so favored.

As Robinson approached John placed himself squarely across his path.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Robinson,” he said.

The ex-steward looked at him coldly. “Good afternoon,” he said, and tried to turn aside and pass. John, however, shifted his position so as to confront him again.

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"I hope you are not in a hurry," he said.
"I'm sure you're not."

"On the contrary, it happens that I am in a hurry," returned Robinson, "and I will thank you to stand aside."

"I ask only a moment of your time," said John. His black eyes were fixed unwaveringly upon Robinson's face, his lips were tight drawn, and he spoke in a crisp even tone.

"I haven't a moment to waste," said Robinson. "Please stand aside." He was considerably taller and larger than John and he looked down upon the slight, wiry boy who blocked his path.

"Answer me just one question," said John.

"Please stand aside," reiterated Robinson, the anger in his tone emphasizing the high-pitched, nasal quality of his voice.

"Why did you shoot at me the other day?"

"I told you then and I also told you I would not repeat my reason again. Will you please stand aside?"

"Your reason is not satisfactory to me," said John.

"It is the only one I shall give."

"In other words," said John tauntingly,

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“you admit that it is not the correct one.”

“I do not intend to engage in an argument with any silly boy,” said Robinson, his face now white with rage. “Let me pass.”

“Let him pass, John,” urged Edward.

“If a man fires a rifle at me I am entitled to know why he did it,” said John between his teeth. “I demand a satisfactory explanation. He says he mistook me for a redcoat. If he did he’s either near-sighted or stupid, and I give him credit for being neither. In other words, I think he’s a liar.”

At this word Robinson uttered an exclamation of rage, and with his clenched fist struck fiercely at the boy who blocked his path. John was too quick for him, however, and ducked the blow, which passed harmlessly over his head. Robinson was thoroughly aroused now, and he struck again at John, first with one hand, then the other. Both of these blows John evaded and he danced nimbly about in front of the ex-steward, watching him as a hawk does a toad, smiling at him, taunting him.

“You don’t like it when I tell you the truth, do you?” he sneered.

Robinson made no reply. He was breathing

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like an angry bull, his face was livid, and he rushed at John, his eyes blazing, his lips drawn back from his teeth, the personification of rage and hatred. Meanwhile John danced about him in a circle, always facing him. He himself had struck no blows, had had no opportunity to do so, and he feared to close with his antagonist, who was so much stronger and heavier than he that he would have been no match for him at all if they should have come to grips.

Edward, meanwhile, had backed away out of range, and was observing the fight from a distance of twenty-five feet or more. His first impulse had been to rush in and try to stand between the two, but he had hesitated, and now his chance was gone. He was distressed about the whole affair, and he was fearful of what might happen to John in case Robinson ever got his hands on him.

“You’ll soon get tired running around like this,” said John, who was himself becoming rather short of breath.

For answer Robinson made a furious rush at him, murder in his eyes. John stepped quickly aside, ducked, and then, straightening up suddenly, shot his fist out and caught the

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ex-steward squarely behind the ear. Robinson was off his balance when the blow fell and its impact sent him reeling. He shot off crazily to one side, on one foot, his arms waving like a Dutch windmill, trying desperately to regain his balance. But to no purpose. A projecting root caught his foot and he fell heavily to the ground. As he fell his head struck a stone and he lay like a log, unconscious.

John was now thoroughly alarmed. There had been no thought in his mind of disabling his opponent, and the fear that Robinson was seriously hurt caused him great concern. He immediately sprang to the side of the prostrate steward, took his head in his lap, and unfastened his stock.

"See if you can get some water from the river, Edward," he cried to his companion.

Edward hastened to the river bank, and a moment later returned with his hat filled with water. It leaked out rapidly, but there was sufficient for John to dip his kerchief in it and sop it onto the spot on Robinson's head where the stone had struck it. The wound was bleeding freely and the ex-steward's hair was already clotted and matted with blood. John

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cleansed it as best he could, and doused the cold water on the back of the unconscious man's neck.

Presently Robinson opened his eyes.

"How do you feel?" John inquired.

"Where am I?" said Robinson dazedly.

"You'll be all right in a moment," said John, who did not wish to enter into any explanations or discussions just at that time.

"We're going to take you back to camp," said Edward. "The doctor will fix you up in no time."

Robinson looked from one boy to the other. He was fast regaining possession of his faculties, and once it looked as if he was about to start for John again, but apparently the mere thought of exertion was too much for him, and with a sigh he sank back weakly. The bleeding had almost ceased, but it had left him weak and unable to rise from the ground unassisted. When Edward and John started to help him to his feet he drew away, the look of rage again flashing into his eyes. It was no use, however. He could not move alone, and there was no one else to help him. He seemed to resign himself to the conditions under which he found himself,

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and presently held out a hand to each boy and permitted them to draw him to his feet.

He had spoken no word since his first question. The expression of his face showed that he now remembered what had taken place and that he resented having to accept assistance from the two boys who now supported him, one on each side. But there was no help for it, and he gritted his teeth, said nothing, and walked along as best he could.

Their progress was necessarily slow, but eventually they came to camp, and John and Edward turned their charge over to the doctor. Their appearance in camp caused no comment or any particular attention. So many of the men were sick and so many were wounded that the sight of a sick or wounded soldier was such a common occurrence that scarcely any one paid any attention. Further, most of the men were so low-spirited and down-hearted themselves that if the truth be known they cared little about the sufferings and hardships of their comrades.

“A slight accident,” said John to the doctor, and the doctor asked no questions. Nor did Robinson offer any explanation.

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John and Edward left him in the doctor's care and went back to their quarters.

"Quite a punch you've got," said Samuel Smith to John when Edward had related the story of the afternoon's encounter. "I hope you're not going to get angry at me."

"If I were angry at you I think I'd restrain myself," said John with a smile, looking at his powerfully built friend.

Edward, meanwhile, had seated himself on a log nearby and was engaged in the perusal of a slip of paper he had drawn from his pocket. His brows were knitted and his face bore a puzzled expression. Presently he arose, walked over to John and handed the paper to him.

"What do you make of this?" he inquired.

John took the proffered slip of paper, turned it over in his hand, and then read what was written on it. His face assumed the same puzzled expression that Edward's had had. He read it a second time.

"Where did you get this?" he asked.

"I picked it up when you were holding Robinson's head in your lap," said Edward. "It was lying on the ground beside you, and I put it in my pocket without reading it or without

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thinking about it for that matter. I only remembered it a moment ago."

"You read it," said John, passing it over to Samuel Smith.

"You found it on the ground beside Robinson?" he asked, turning to Edward once more.

"Yes. I saw it lying there, and unconsciously I picked it up and slipped it into my pocket."

"Do you suppose Robinson wrote it?" demanded John suddenly.

"I wonder," said Edward.

Arthur Tryon came along at that moment, and halted in front of the three friends.

"My, but you all look serious," he exclaimed. "What is it, a council of war and what have you decided the army should do next?"

"It's a council all right," said John, "but of what we don't know exactly. Show Arthur the paper and let's get his opinion."

Samuel Smith handed it over to Arthur without a word.

"Read it aloud," suggested Edward.

"With pleasure," said Arthur smilingly, and he ran his eye rapidly over the written lines. John looked at Arthur curiously. Whenever he heard him speak he could not help but be

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reminded of the voice that had spoken so harshly to them that July evening through the window of Nassau Hall,—to be more exact perhaps, he was reminded of Fleetmann and Robinson, and of one of them in particular. He wondered which one. Since Arthur had been cleared of any suspicion himself John had wanted to tell him about the whole affair, to laugh with him about the part Arthur himself had taken in it, and possibly glean from him some information which might be helpful in clearing up the mystery.

Arthur cleared his throat. "The communication is not addressed to any one, nor does it bear any signature," he said.

"Read it," said Edward.

Arthur read as follows: "*You will recall that I promised to gain the information we wanted and have it in your hands before the first of the new year. I am encouraged to think I shall not be obliged to disappoint you. Within the week I hope to be able to notify you that arrangements are complete and that the business will be concluded to our entire satisfaction.*"

"What does it mean?" Samuel Smith inquired.

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“That I can’t say,” Arthur replied. “And I am particularly puzzled because I have no idea regarding the person who wrote it or what his motives were in doing so. It might mean any one of several things.”

“That’s true,” said John, “and of course you are not acquainted with the circumstances under which it was found. We have a suspicion who wrote it. You have not. We also have a suspicion as to why he wrote it. You have not. You are therefore in a position to express an entirely unprejudiced opinion and tell us how it strikes you who are entirely new to the matter.”

“Your cousin, Judge Stirling, could not have summed up the case any better,” said Arthur, with a bow. “You are a credit to Nassau Hall.”

“Give us your opinion,” said John. “This is business.”

“I know it is,” said Arthur, and his manner became serious at once. “My opinion, perhaps I should say impression, for the whole thing is new to me, is that this note sounds suspiciously like the work of a spy, some one in our army it may be who is seeking information to pass onto the enemy.”

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Silence greeted his words. Samuel Smith, John and Edward exchanged glances and then all concentrated their gaze upon Arthur.

“I can see from your expressions that perhaps my opinion is the same as yours,” he said with a smile which disclosed his even white teeth. “Am I to be favored with the name of the party under suspicion?”

“Why—” John began, when Samuel Smith interrupted him.

“For the present,” he said, “it seems to me only fair that we should not disclose his name. After all, we have suspicions only, and we may be doing some one an injustice.”

“Of course,” said Arthur readily. “I understand.”

“It isn’t because we don’t trust you,” said John hastily, always afraid of hurting some one’s feelings.

“Don’t worry about that for a moment,” laughed Arthur. “I fully appreciate your feeling in the matter and I think you are quite right about it. And now I must be moving on. If there is anything I can do to help, though, I hope you will let me know.”

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“We will indeed,” said John. “I’m glad you understand.”

Arthur left them, and the three friends put their heads together. Each one of them read the words written on the paper once again.

“I’m becoming dizzy,” John exclaimed with a sigh. “It seems to me Arthur is correct in saying this sounds like the work of a spy. The circumstances under which it was found certainly leads one to believe that Robinson wrote it. Is he a spy? I don’t know. If he is, what is Fleetmann and what was he rowing across the river for this afternoon? I don’t know that either. All we can say is that suspicion points to one or the other of them.”

“Perhaps to both,” Samuel Smith suggested.

“I hadn’t thought of that,” said John soberly.

“It’s possible, though,” said Samuel Smith. “Isn’t it?”

“Entirely possible,” Edward agreed. “But what’s their game?”

“If we only knew,” said John. “Personally, however, I doubt if they are working together. Don’t you remember how Robinson used to put

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Fleetmann out of Nassau Hall every time he went over there to sell his fruits? He always acted as if he disliked him intensely."

"But they both act queerly, you'll admit that?" said Edward.

"I must admit it of course," John agreed. "But somehow I can't reconcile Robinson and Fleetmann."

"Their voices are alike."

"Exactly alike," John admitted. "One or the other of them is a spy. I'm convinced of that. But which one?"

"John," said Samuel Smith, lighting his pipe with an ember from the fire held between two small sticks, "isn't it possible that they both may be spies? They would not have to be working together, and they may not like each other personally. That would not necessarily mean they both were not in the employ of the enemy, however."

"Oh, you're right of course," cried John, "but the whole affair becomes more mixed up and involved every day. As I say, I'm becoming dizzy and confused with it all."

"Suppose we hand the paper to Robinson," Edward suggested. "If he were suddenly con-

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fronted with it his manner might give him away."

"Not a bad idea," said Samuel Smith. "Let's do that the first thing in the morning."

"To-morrow is Christmas," said John. "Perhaps we can give General Washington a spy for a Christmas present."

"But what is he accused of?" asked Edward.

"Of being a spy," said John.

"We must have proof," said Edward. "If we could prove that he was the man who followed you to the Van Pelts', who spoke to us through the window of Nassau Hall, who wrote this note and we knew definitely what the note was about, that would be all right. The question in my mind is whether it is possible to arrest a man merely on suspicion."

"I believe it is," said Samuel Smith. "In war time it is not always possible to wait until one has all the facts. The damage might be done by that time. Arrest him on suspicion and give him a trial. That's my idea."

"I might ask Captain Robbins," John suggested.

Thomas Leonard returned to the little group at that moment. He was visibly excited and

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apparently the possessor of important information.

“To-morrow is Christmas,” he exclaimed, standing in front of his three friends and looking at them excitedly.

“We had just remarked on that fact,” said John, his hands clasped behind his head and his legs stretched out towards the fire.

“Well,” said Thomas, bending forward and speaking in a low, tense voice, “I happen to know that General Washington is preparing to give the British a Christmas present that they will never forget.”

CHAPTER XIII

CHRISTMAS, 1776

CHRISTMAS day dawned gray and cold. A biting northeast wind swept across the Delaware, bringing with it rain squalls, flurries of snow, hail, and a penetrating chill that no amount of clothing could keep out. Washington's little army, numbering scarcely more than twenty-four hundred men, was insufficiently clad, insufficiently fed and the storm added untold misery to their already almost unbearable sufferings.

But the camp was early astir. A feeling of expectancy, a sense of some great event impending pervaded the little Continental Army, and there was so much to do that there was no time left for the men to brood upon their troubles. Equipment was gone over carefully, rifles cleaned and oiled, cartridge belts filled, cannon and powder and shot collected under the trees by the river bank, boats patched up and oars examined so that when the time came to cross the river everything should be in readiness.

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John, Edward, Thomas and Samuel Smith were so busy all day long that they had no opportunity to seek out Robinson and confront him with the paper Edward had picked up the day previous. They saw him several times, but always in company with a squad of soldiers busily engaged in preparations for the crossing and never alone. None of the four friends had any desire to test him in the presence of others.

Fleetmann also was in evidence, but he too was just as busy as every one else, and besides there was nothing definite to speak to him about. In fact there was little time even to wonder about his suspicious behavior of the previous afternoon.

In the course of the day John met Arthur Tryon.

“Any news of the spy to-day?” asked Arthur.

“None,” John replied, “and no time to think about him.”

“I should say not,” said Arthur. “Let’s hope though that he has not got word of our plans to the Hessians across the river.”

“Let’s pray he hasn’t,” exclaimed John fer-

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vently, and he felt a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach as he recalled Fleetmann's voyage across the river, and wondered if there could be any connection between that suspicious expedition and the plans General Washington had laid for that night.

Darkness descended upon the camp early, and with the evening the wind increased in force and the cold became more intense. The army, after an early supper, assembled on the banks of the river and the work of loading the cannon on board the boats was begun. It was hard work, and it was dangerous as well. The night was pitch-dark and no fires could be lighted for fear the enemy across the river would see their glow and suspect some unusual activity on the part of the Continentals. The wind blew such a gale that one could scarcely stand against it. More than one man assisting in putting the cannon aboard was unable to keep his balance on the narrow thwarts of the boats, and was precipitated into the icy water.

In the work of loading Samuel Smith did yeoman service. His great strength was of invaluable aid and he worked with the energy of ten men.

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“Helps to keep you warm,” he said to John. “It’s kind of rough on one’s hands though. I don’t think there is a particle of skin left on any one of my knuckles.”

By seven o’clock the first boatload had started. It was followed a few moments later by another, and then another and another. One by one the skiffs, barges, flatboats and craft of all kinds and descriptions pushed out into the stream and were quickly swallowed up by the inky darkness.

It was nearly midnight before John and Edward started. Samuel Smith had already made two crossings, acting as steersman for one of the barges on which the cannon were loaded. He acted as pilot for the barge on which they embarked. Fleetmann too was in the company and as they were pushing off Edward nudged John.

“There’s Robinson,” he whispered.

Thomas and Arthur Tryon had been aboard one of the first boats to set out.

Both John and Edward had hoped they would be ordered to man a sweep, because they wanted the exercise to keep them warm, but the places

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were all filled and they were huddled in the bow with a dozen other half-frozen soldiers. The northeast wind had lashed the river until it writhed as if in pain and huge waves beat against the prow of the boat to dispute its progress and to break in angry fury, drenching the voyagers with their icy spray. Enormous blocks of ice charged at the heavily-laden barge, threatening to cave in its sides and send it plunging to the bottom of the river.

One of the men stood up in the bow and by shouted directions did his best to instruct Samuel Smith in choosing his course. But he could not see all of the ice, and it was utterly impossible to avoid every cake, and one huge block of it, lifted high in the air by an oncoming wave, struck the barge on the starboard side with such force that every one on board was thrown precipitately from his seat or standing place headlong to the bottom of the boat.

John's chin struck the hub of one of the cannon wheels with such violence that he was rendered almost unconscious. A myriad of sparks flashed through his brain, and for a moment he thought that every tooth in his head had been

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loosened. Utter confusion reigned on board and as the men scrambled to regain their positions there came the cry of "Man overboard."

Every one sprang to the sides of the barge and tried to pierce the darkness of the night with his gaze to discover the whereabouts of the missing soldier. Every one gave directions, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that Captain Robbins, the officer in command, was able to restore order and give directions for the search.

It was of no avail. Not a trace of the man was found. The wind still shrieked and howled about them, the waves beat against the barge and the ice hurled itself clumsily at the shivering boatload of soldiers, but the man was gone. When five minutes had elapsed Captain Robbins reluctantly gave orders to proceed, and one more name had been added to the list of those who gave their lives for their country.

"Who was it?" Edward demanded.

"Don't know," said John, holding on to his jaw. "I was about knocked out there for a moment and have little idea of what happened."

"Who was it?" Edward asked the soldier on the other side of him.

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“Dunno,” said the man indifferently. Like most of the others, he was wet and cold, and so engrossed with his own sufferings that he had little interest in the troubles of others.

Edward lapsed into silence. John had nothing to say. His jaw had commenced to swell and was so sore already that he could scarcely shut his teeth together. His head ached from the jolt he had received and he was in the depths of misery. He felt as if he would care but little if he too fell overboard and ended it all then and there. He became indifferent to the spray which drenched him every few moments, and he no longer tried to resist the rolling of the barge which tossed him first to the left, then to the right, then forward, then backward, throwing him this way and that, buffeting him and bruising him all over his body.

Finally the barge reached the Jersey shore. The men stumbled out of the boat, and up the bank, a squad of those already landed coming down to meet them and get the cannon ashore.

The army was gathered in an open field a short distance from the river, and each individual strove to locate and join his own regiment. Samuel Smith had remained aboard the barge,

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being assigned to the task of piloting it on another trip across the river and back. John and Edward and the other men of their regiment, under the guidance of Captain Robbins, were led to the spot where the rest of their command was located.

“That you, John?” inquired a voice.

“Yes. Hello, Thomas,” exclaimed John. “Where’s Arthur?”

“Sent off on some scouting work, I believe. As soon as we landed he and another man hustled away. Arthur of course didn’t give me the details, but he seemed mightily pleased to have been chosen and went off in high spirits.”

“Fleetmann and Robinson crossed with us,” whispered John. “You haven’t seen them anywhere, have you? I haven’t.”

Captain Robbins came up at that moment.

“Bad news for you Princetonians,” he announced.

“What do you mean, sir?” exclaimed John in alarm. “Has anything happened to the college? Have the Hessians burned Nassau Hall?”

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“No,” said the captain. “Not that I know of. It’s news of a different sort, about one of the citizens of Princeton.”

The three boys immediately thought of President Witherspoon, of Professor Houston, of Christopher Beekman, the genial proprietor of *The Sign of the College*, and their many other friends in the town, and wondered what dreadful thing could have happened.

“Who?” demanded John. “What has happened?”

“The man who was lost overboard was Fleetmann,” said Captain Robbins.

For a moment none of the boys spoke. They were too startled to do anything but stand still and gasp in amazement.

“Fleetmann?” exclaimed Edward finally.

“Yes,” said Captain Robbins. “You all knew him, didn’t you? He kept a small store in Princeton, I believe, and used to peddle his wares to the students in Nassau Hall. You must have known him.”

“We did know him,” said John. “But it’s a shock to us to learn that he is dead.”

“It’s a shock to me too,” said Captain Rob-

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bins. "He was one of the best men we had."

This was an interesting bit of news for the three boys.

"A fine fellow," Captain Robbins continued. "He was the kind of a man who, if told to do a thing, would always do it no matter how difficult it was. Only yesterday he carried out an extremely dangerous scouting commission which had been given him to do. He crossed the river alone, found out exactly what he had been sent to find out, and brought back his report."

"You don't say so?" stammered John. He could scarcely credit his ears.

"A fine fellow and a true patriot," said Captain Robbins. "We shall miss him dreadfully." He turned and walked away.

"What do you think of that?" demanded John of Thomas and Edward when Captain Robbins had passed on. "We certainly were fooled on him all right."

"Yes," said Edward, "but after all it helps to clear matters up."

"How do you mean?"

"We've been looking for a spy, and out of three suspects originally we eliminated one when we found that Arthur Tryon had been

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with the army all the time you were away on your trip to Morristown and therefore couldn't have been the man who followed you. That left Fleetmann and Robinson. Now Fleetmann is gone and we hear from Captain Robbins that he was one of the most trusted and highly thought of men in the army. That leaves just one of the original three. Things are clearing up."

"I guess you're right, Edward," said Thomas. "'Twould seem that way, wouldn't it, John?"

"It would indeed," said John. "At my first opportunity I shall report everything we know to Captain Robbins. You've still got that paper you found, haven't you, Edward?"

"I have," said Edward.

CHAPTER XIV

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It was not until four o'clock in the morning that the army was ready to move. The difficulties encountered in forcing a passage of the river had been so much greater than expected that four more hours were consumed than had been counted on. Twenty-four hundred men and twenty pieces of artillery, ferried across a swift, ice-choked river, in darkness, snow and sleet was an undertaking of no mean proportions.

The army was separated into two divisions. Samuel Smith had rejoined his regiment now that the crossing was accomplished, and he, John, Edward and Thomas—all in the same company with Robinson—were attached to the division led by General Washington. They went straight back from the river about a mile and a half, then turned south and followed the road which joined the highway running be-

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tween Trenton and Pennington, about a mile out of the village of Trenton. No one spoke on the march except in an occasional whisper. The officers gave their commands in as low tones as possible, and every effort was made to preserve silence. The cannon brought up the rear and the jolting of their wheels over the uneven and frozen road supplied most of the noise that was made.

“We must keep our eyes on Robinson,” John whispered to Samuel Smith.

Cold was forgotten now. Discomfort was a thing of the distant past. John even forgot his swollen jaw. A tense feeling of excitement pervaded the whole army. Battle lay ahead. Death probably waited for some of them. They were marching against the Hessians, the far-famed veterans from the bloody battlefields of Europe. It seemed preposterous almost for green, untried troops to attempt such a thing. That it was a bold stroke every one knew. Every one knew too that it must be successful if the colonists were to take courage to continue the struggle. There was no money even to pay the soldiers. The fortunes of the thirteen colonies had never been at such a low ebb,

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and unless the army could reverse its string of defeats the rest of the American people would stand behind it no longer.

All the men knew this. General Washington himself had told them so. He had stated frankly that here was a chance presented to better conditions all through the colonies. He was going to seize it. But to be successful his men must stand behind him, all of them. Every man had sworn to himself to do his duty.

There were some exceptions, of course. John thought he knew of one.

The low gray clouds scudding across the winter sky reflected the light of the new day before the army came in sight of the little village of Trenton. The men in Washington's division did not know when the other division—the one under General Sullivan, which was coming by way of the river road—would arrive. The distance each had to travel was about equal, however, and the chances were that they would reach the village at about the same time.

Suddenly the sound of firing came to their ears.

“Sullivan has encountered the Hessian out-

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posts," said Samuel Smith calmly. "It'll be our turn presently."

He had scarcely uttered these words when from behind a hedge in front of them came the rattle of musketry fire. Half a dozen bullets whined over their heads.

The army at once deployed in open order and advanced on the run. They were in the outskirts of Trenton and the success of the enterprise now depended upon the speed with which it was carried out. The Hessian pickets could be seen retreating from house to house, halting behind every bit of cover to reload and fire at the oncoming Continentals.

The Americans advanced on the double quick, cheering. Frightened faces appeared at the windows of the houses they passed, although sometimes a window was thrown open and a cheer given for the passing army. The cannon rumbled and rattled over the hard ground, their crews dragging them by hand and proceeding with every bit of speed at their command.

The Hessian drums beating the call to arms could now be heard. At the head of King Street Washington halted his division. Part of it he sent down Queen Street and part down

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King. John and his friends were with the party entering the village by way of King Street.

Firing came to their ears from the western side of the village.

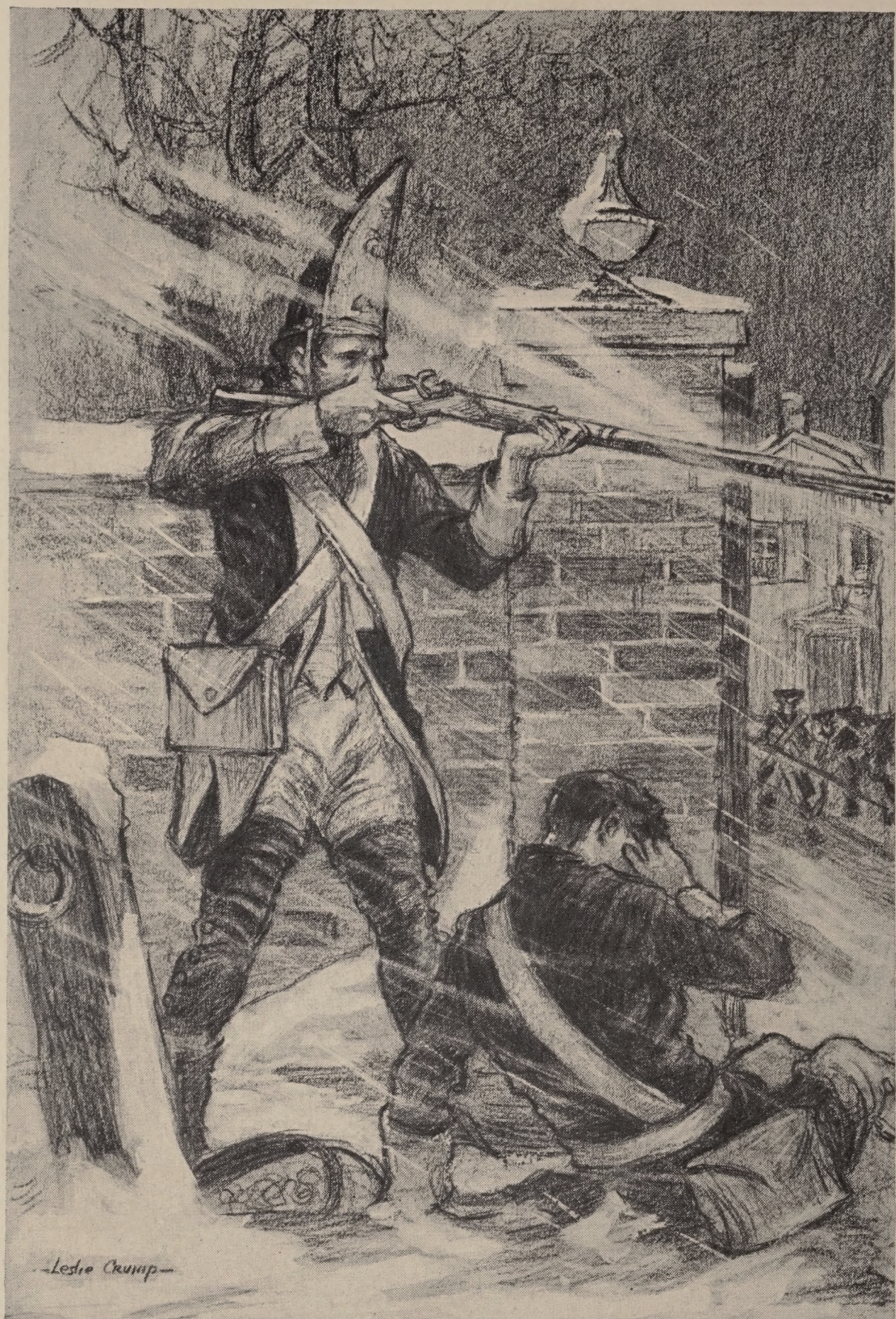
“Sullivan must be coming in Second and Front Streets,” cried Edward. “That’s where I live.”

Ahead of them they could see the Hessians. Their officers were running about wildly, trying to marshal the men into battle order. Everything seemed in confusion and in a hurly-burly of excitement. Evidently the enemy had been caught napping and the men were huddled together in the middle of the street like a lot of sheep.

The Americans ran along the side of the streets, dodging from house to house and from tree to tree, firing as they went.

“Not too fast,” warned Captain Robbins. “Give the artillery a chance.”

As he spoke a battery stationed at the head of King Street opened fire. Grape and canister poured into the crowded ranks of the Hessians and a score of them went down. An officer on horseback—the Hessian Colonel Rall as John learned later—was riding furiously about,



AHEAD OF THEM THEY COULD SEE THE HESSIANS

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striving desperately to form his panic-stricken and demoralized troops into some kind of order. But it was a well-nigh hopeless task. The Hessians were backed up against the Assunpinck Creek, a considerable stream flowing through the village, the Continentals were in front of them, and on both sides, hemming them in completely.

Suddenly a squad of Hessians appeared out of a side lane, dragging two cannon. They wheeled them into the center of the street, swung their muzzles around so as to point at the oncoming Continentals and started feverishly to load them.

Captain Robbins, however, was quick to discover them.

"Follow me," he shouted, and dashed off at top speed.

At his very heels followed Samuel Smith, and close behind him John, Edward, Thomas, and a half dozen others of their company.

The Hessian gunners had rammed the charges home and were hastily preparing to fire. A soldier just in back of John stopped running, dropped on one knee, raised his rifle and fired. The Hessian standing at the breech

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of one of the guns dropped in his tracks. This was enough for the other members of the gun crew and they turned in a body and fled.

“German cowards,” shouted John, beside himself with excitement.

“Right you are,” cried Edward. “Look!”

He pointed in the direction of the creek, and on the opposite side John saw a rabble of Hessians, some on foot, some on horseback, fleeing at top speed.

“On the road to Bordentown,” exclaimed Edward.

Colonel Rall, meanwhile, was still trying to rally his men. He swore at them, he shouted at them, he beseeched, he implored, he threatened. And all the time the Continentals, posted behind every available tree, house, and shed, were pouring volley after volley into them. The American batteries raked them from three sides.

“Watch me bring down the old cock bird,” cried Samuel Smith to John. He stepped out from behind the tree he had been using for protection, exposed himself to the full view of the enemy, took deliberate aim and fired.

Colonel Rall at the moment was trying to

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lead his demoralized troops to the attack. Suddenly he reeled in his saddle, his sword dropped limply from his hand, all the strength seemed to leave his body and he slid from his seat and fell to the ground in a heap, pale and bleeding.

Two of his aides sprang to his side, lifted him from the ground and bore him away. An officer in the uniform of a lieutenant-colonel immediately took Colonel Rall's place at the head of the troops. But all order was at an end. Seeing their commander fall, the Hessians fled in dismay, the main body attempting to escape by the road to Princeton, but their retreat was cut off by Colonel Hand with a body of Pennsylvania riflemen. The fugitives, ignorant of the smallness of the force that stood in their way, and having only the courage of hired troops, threw down their arms and implored mercy.

Meanwhile John and Samuel Smith had followed Captain Robbins into the house where Colonel Rall had been carried. The house belonged to a Mr. Stacy Potts and was kept by him as a tavern. As the three Continental soldiers entered the front door they discovered a

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young girl lying at their feet, her hair disheveled, and spots of blood on the wooden floor.

“Hessian dirty work, I’ll wager,” exclaimed Samuel Smith angrily, and he stooped and picked the girl up in his arms and carried her to a sofa in the adjoining room.

As he put her down she opened her eyes. She was pale and trembling with fright.

“A bullet hit my comb,” she cried in a shaking voice. “I was next door and started to run home when a bullet struck the comb right out of my hair and knocked me down. I got up and continued into the house, and then I reckon I must have fainted.”

“You’d better be glad it was nothing worse,” exclaimed Samuel Smith in astonishment. “As it is you’re not badly hurt and will be all right again in a few moments. Is there anything we can do for you?”

“Is the fighting over?” she inquired anxiously.

“Entirely over, I think,” said John.

He peered out the window. Squads of Hessians, guarded by grinning Continentals, were being marched in from all directions. In one spot in the center of the street other Conti-

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nentals were collecting the spoils,—brass field pieces, rifles in enormous quantity, ammunition, a number of drums, and he also counted four captured colors.

“We must have a thousand prisoners,” he exclaimed excitedly.

Captain Robbins reappeared in the doorway at that moment.

“Come along,” he said, “there is nothing we can do here.”

“Is Colonel Rall upstairs?” asked Samuel Smith.

“Yes, and dying, I think.”

A shadow crossed Samuel Smith's face at these words. He believed himself to be the man who had fired the fatal shot, so that he it was who had been the cause of the Hessian commander's mortal wound. It was not pleasant to think of. True, it was war, and the enemy's resistance had disappeared the moment their leader fell, so that in all probability Samuel Smith's shot had in the long run been the means of saving much bloodshed. No man likes to feel, however, that he has caused the death of another human being.

Outside the house they encountered Edward.

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“What a day,” he cried gleefully. “This morning marks the turning point of the war. You see if it doesn’t. The news of this victory will spread like wildfire over the colonies and every one who has been discouraged and downhearted will be correspondingly cheered up and encouraged to go on. They can’t stop us now, and we’ve buried the fear of the Hessians once and for all. I’ve heard at least a dozen soldiers say already that they’re going to reënlist at once.”

“I hope they all do,” said John fervently. “Otherwise there won’t be many left by the first of the year.”

Every one was in high spirits. The prisoners were being rounded up, and a count made of the captured guns and equipment.

“So far as we can tell,” said Captain Robbins, “we lost only two men killed. Six enemy officers have been reported dead and between twenty and thirty men. Our prisoners total over twenty officers and more than eight hundred men. Not a bad day’s work.”

Not a bad day’s work indeed. General Washington’s bold stroke at Trenton, which resulted in such a brilliant success, proved the

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hinge upon which the American cause seemed to turn. Tories and those who openly embraced neither side, and were generally regarded as Tories on that account, had lately been exultant and noisy. Now they became silent and alarmed. Those who favored the cause of the colonies took heart, as Edward had predicted, and the soldiers—many of them, to be sure, influenced by the promise of extra pay—flocked to reënlist. General Cornwallis, who had considered the “rebellion” at an end and was preparing to sail home to England, was hastily ordered back to the army. Another English general, Grant, who had been with the main army at New Brunswick, advanced to Princeton, and all the British forces in the Jerseys were as much concentrated in the direction of Trenton as circumstances would allow.

No one realized the danger of overconfidence more than General Washington, however. He was naturally delighted with the way matters had turned out, and pleased perhaps even more with the recent action of the Continental Congress in conferring greatly increased powers on him as commander-in-chief. But he knew the

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hard road to be traveled before the ultimate victory could be secured.

Even in the flush of the stunning success at Trenton he did not allow caution to forsake him. His army was vastly inferior to the enemy forces in the neighborhood, and with a wide ice-choked river at his back he knew how perilous his position would be if the British chose to attack. He therefore led his weary soldiers back along the road to McKonkey's Ferry, and with almost as great difficulty as he had experienced in getting them across the river the night previous ferried them back again, together with his prisoners and booty.

They were a weary lot of men who reached the camp on the Pennsylvania shore that day.

"I'm so tired I can scarcely speak," gasped Arthur Tryon, stretching himself at full length on the ground in front of the fire Samuel Smith, John, Edward and Thomas had kindled.

"Well, lying on the cold ground won't do you any good," exclaimed John. "Where were you all through the fighting, Arthur? I didn't lay eyes on you once until we were starting back."

"I was there all the time," said Arthur.

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“When we landed I was sent ahead on some scouting work, and joined up with the army again when it entered the village.” He made no move to get off the ground.

“I saw you,” said Thomas. “I can account for him, John.”

John dropped his voice. “Who can account for Robinson?” he asked. “Did any one see him?”

Every one in the little group remembered seeing him when the army marched out of Trenton on the way back. John and Edward remembered him in the barge crossing the river. From the time he landed on the Jersey shore until the return journey was commenced, however, no one had any recollection of him at all.

“And listen to this,” exclaimed Samuel Smith, removing his pipe from his mouth and leaning forward confidentially. “I talked with a colored man over in Trenton to-day who is a servant in the home of a Mr. Hunt. Mr. Hunt, I understand, is a man who is supposed to be neutral, although from what I hear he has often been accused of strong Tory sympathies, but never of being a very ardent Whig.”

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“That’s right,” said Edward. “I know him. He’s a townsman of mine, you know.”

“Well,” continued Samuel Smith, “it seems that Mr. Hunt gave a Christmas party yesterday evening. There was plenty of wine and a game of cards was started. Colonel Rall and a number of other Hessian officers were there and all of them had a good deal to drink. They got to playing cards, and they kept on playing cards, all night long. The colored servant told me that no one seemed to worry about Washington at all; they apparently considered it impossible for him to cross the river and cause them any trouble. He himself had to keep awake and wait on the officers.

“Shortly before daylight this morning, he says, there came a knock at the door, and when he opened it there was a man standing there wearing the insignia of the Middlesex regiment, with an envelope in his hand.

“‘I want to speak with Colonel Rall,’ the soldier said to him, but the negro servant had had strict orders not to disturb the colonel under any circumstances. He told the soldier this and insisted upon it in spite of the man’s pleadings. ‘Then give him this note,’ the sol-

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dier begged. 'It means the safety of his army, maybe his own life.' The negro did not wish to do even that much, but the soldier was so insistent that he finally agreed to hand the note to Colonel Rall.

"He took the note from the soldier's hand, and after promising faithfully to deliver it shut the door and went into the room where the card game was being played. Colonel Rall was dealing, and when the servant handed him the note he did not even look at it, but merely shoved it into his pocket and went on dealing out the cards."

"That note warned him of our approach," exclaimed John excitedly.

"Of course it did," said Samuel Smith. "If Colonel Rall had opened it we never would have won our victory there to-day."

There was complete silence in the little circle as the young soldiers pondered these words. Finally John spoke.

"Who is the man who delivered the message?"

"That's what we want to find out," said Samuel Smith with a hard laugh. He replaced his pipe in his mouth and reached for a light.

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“Would the servant be able to identify him if he saw him again?” Edward inquired.

“He says it was pretty dark,” said Samuel Smith, “but he thinks he would know the man. He couldn’t give me any clear description of his appearance, though, but said the thing that impressed him most was the man’s voice.”

At these words every one listening started perceptibly.

“Yes?” said John.

“He said the man seemed to talk through his nose.”

John sprang to his feet excitedly.

“Wait a minute,” said Arthur, who had roused himself to a sitting posture at the commencement of the story. “That might describe my voice. At least I’m told that my voice is nasal.”

“Yes,” said John, leaning forward eagerly, “and so is Robinson’s.”

“By George,” cried Arthur, “that’s true. So he is the man you suspect, is he? Well, I have my doubts about him myself. I’ll volunteer to be one to go to Captain Robbins and report the whole affair.”

“I had already decided to do that,” said

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John. "Perhaps Samuel will go with me, as he is familiar with the case from the very beginning. If you don't mind, Arthur, I really think we would do it better than you."

"No doubt you're right," said Arthur agreeably. "But old Robinson. Well, well, well."

CHAPTER XV

NEWS FROM PRINCETON

THE following morning John and Samuel Smith reported to Captain Robbins and related the whole story, from start to finish. He listened attentively, interposed a question now and then, and when they had finished sat silent for a few moments.

“This is serious business,” he exclaimed finally.

“We think so,” said Samuel Smith.

“You suspect Robinson, don’t you?” asked the captain.

“He seems to be the only one there is to suspect,” said John. “As we told you, there were three we suspected at the start, because all three of them had high-pitched nasal voices. We eliminated Arthur Tryon when I returned from Basking Ridge and found that he had been here while I was away and therefore couldn’t have been the one I heard talking beside the hay-

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stack at Mr. Van Pelt's. We're sure he is all right. Fleetmann and Robinson were left, and now Fleetmann is dead and you tell us there never was any cause to suspect him. That leaves only Robinson. The paper Edward found, his firing at me, the fact that no one can account for him between our landing yesterday morning and our return, the story of the messenger with the nasal voice who tried to see Colonel Rall,—all those things. Well—”

“Things point his way I must admit,” said Captain Robbins as John broke off. “I will take steps to have him watched.”

John and Samuel Smith thanked Captain Robbins for listening so attentively to their story, and then they left headquarters and walked away. They had gone only a short distance when Edward appeared, a letter in his hand.

“For you, John,” he said.

John took the letter and examined the handwriting. “Why, it’s from Mrs. Leonard,” he exclaimed. “We’ll get all the news of Princeton. Who gave it to you, Edward?”

“A man named Brakely, one of our scouts

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who was in Princeton a few days ago. Mrs. Leonard asked him to deliver it to you."

"I don't know Brakely, and I'm sure he doesn't know me. She told him I was in the Middlesex Regiment, I suppose."

"I suppose so," said Edward.

"Well, let's look for some place where we can all sit down and read the letter," exclaimed John. "Come on, Samuel."

They found seats on the front steps of a house which had been taken over by the quartermaster, and after they were comfortably settled John broke the seal on the envelope and drew out the letter.

"Looks like a long one," said Edward.

"It is," said John, riffling the sheets. "Mrs. Leonard writes a small hand. Well, let's read it."

He spread the sheets out on his knees and began:

" 'PRINCE TOWN, *Christmas Eve*, 1776.

" 'MY DEAR JOHN:

" 'I trust this epistle finds you safe and in good health. Our soldiers are obliged to suffer many hardships these days for the sake of our

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great cause, and I am happy to know that you are able to bear your share. I know you will always do your full duty, and my only concern is that the sickness, which I hear is so prevalent among our men, may pass you by. Take the best care of yourself, not only for your own sake, but for the sake of your country. A sick soldier is a burden and we have many burdens already.

“ ‘Shortly after your enlistment your second cousin, Judge Henry Stirling from Newark, called on me. He had come to Princeton to see how you were getting on and to advise you about your part in the war. He was surprised to hear that you had enlisted already, but he was proud of you, I know. A fine man, Judge Stirling, and a handsome man too. What a limb he was in college!’ ”

“ ‘The purpose of this letter is not to tell you about your cousin, however, but to give you the latest news of Princeton and of the college.’ ”

John looked up from the letter.

“ ‘You see,’ he exclaimed, ‘I knew she would give us the news.’ ”

“ ‘Go on and read it,’ said Edward shortly.

John proceeded:

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“ ‘You would find Princeton a deserted village if you should come here now. It has the appearance of having been desolated with the plague and an earthquake, as well as with the calamities of war. The college was disbanded on November 29. President Witherspoon called all the students together in the prayer hall, explained that the college could be continued no longer, and bade them farewell. Characteristically, however, he expressed faith in the future and said he hoped and expected to see them back again. What a wonderful spirit he has! The few students have scattered, Professor Houston has disappeared, I know not where, and Nassau Hall itself is a barracks, full of Redcoats and Hessians. The Presbyterian Church too is being used as a barracks. The inhabitants of the town have almost all fled. I myself saw Dr. Witherspoon riding out of the village on his sorrel mare, Mrs. Witherspoon following in the old family chair with young Mr. Hawkins of North Carolina holding the reins. Nearly every one has gone. I myself would have gone had I any place to go. Not being so fortunate as some others, I am obliged to remain at home, trying to protect my prop-

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erty from these pillagers. (Of course I should not use such epithets, for this letter might fall into their hands, but I never could resist the truth.)

“ ‘The Hessians are the worst as one would suspect. They always remind me of great hogs, with their close-cropped heads, bristling mustaches, and fat round bodies. I really think the English officers try to restrain their men to some extent, but not these Hessians! How I despise them!

“ ‘During the two days before the British army came to town the inhabitants were leaving in an almost continuous procession. Of necessity the majority had to leave most of their possessions behind, and most of these goods were promptly seized by the soldiers upon their arrival. They have been guilty of so many wanton deeds too. For example, they have burnt up all the firewood the inhabitants had collected for the winter, and, not satisfied with that, have stripped houses and shops, and knocked down fences, and, making huge bonfires, burnt everything up. They have even cut down fruit trees and burnt them.

“ ‘The large new house recently erected by

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Jonathan D. Sargeant, Esq.,¹ they burnt up at a loss, I am told, of over £620. The grist mills on the Millstone River belonging to Major William Scudder they burnt, together with his dwelling house, at a loss of nearly £1,200. They have burnt wheat fields in the western end of town, they have robbed tanners of their hides, stolen flax and used it in building fortifications.

“ ‘A party of Hessians stole several horses from one man a few days since, one of the animals being reputed worth £100. They walk through the streets insulting the inhabitants and pulling their hats off of their heads. All this in spite of written “protections” given to many of the people by the officers, these “protections” being designed to make the persons possessed of them inviolate in person and in property. Three days ago two Hessians mounted on poor horses rode out to a farmer’s house, dismounted from their own beasts and demanded his in exchange. Fortunately he had been able to send all his possessions away before these robber bands came to town.

“ ‘Four other Hessians only yesterday went to the home of a Quaker family (and most of

¹ On the present site of The Nassau Club.

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these outrages have been practised on persons of the Quaker faith, who, as you know, do not believe in fighting and have taken sides with neither country), and after treating the whole household insolently and insultingly, one of them (a great hulking brute) seized the hat off the man's head and threw it on the ground. The Quaker, however (although a small man and nearly sixty years of age), sprang at the bully, tripped him up, put his foot upon his sword so that he could not draw it, took his hat again and replaced it upon his head. Thereupon the three other blackguards drew their swords and forced him to yield up his hat. This in spite of the fact that the Quaker had received a "protection" (what a farce) a few days previously. Not content with this they broke down his stable door, stole his mare and carried off four fine hogs.

"Four miles out of town British and Hessians together robbed two brothers (who were farmers) of all their movable property, ripped open their beds, strewed the feathers about and carried off all the blankets so that there was nothing left to cover them. They go out at night and kill sheep and cows. One of their

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favorite tricks is to bargain with a man for property and when the bargain is struck, they take the property and give the owner receipts which are worth nothing. Never do they pay moneys.

“ ‘Mr. Richard Stockton’s home ‘Morven’ has been robbed and is being used as the headquarters of the commanding officer. President Witherspoon’s country home ‘Tusculum’ has been pillaged also, and seriously damaged, I fear.

“ ‘Their soldiers are boarded out at citizens’ houses, where the men take the best rooms, and force the owners to feed them and their horses as well. One gentleman farmer here had one hundred and seventy of these unwelcome guests. The officers took the best beds and rooms that the house afforded, while the soldiers slept in the barns, fed their horses on his best oats, and after several days paid him twenty shillings for at least fifty pounds damage. Mr. Joseph Shelton lost in one night to the dragoons, five stacks of hay, five hundred sheaves of wheat, four sheep, twenty-seven horses, two cows and a wagon.

“ ‘Another of their practices is to trump up

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charges against innocent people and report their names to the officers, whereupon orders are issued to seize all the property of these unfortunate persons on the ground that they are forfeit to the king.

“I write you of these things in detail so that you may know what is transpiring in our little village. I want you to know of these things and to tell others about them so that their wills may be strengthened to bring the evil doers to justice. If I were not afraid of wearying you I could multiply these instances almost indefinitely, for there is no end seemingly to what these marauders will do.

“ ‘The college I feel sure is suffering at their hands and knowing as I do how you love its brown stone walls, and the stately trees which surround it, the thought of its being at the mercy of a host of vandals will rouse your fighting blood. May the time be not far distant when these alien soldiers are driven out of our country never to return.

“ ‘And now pardon this long letter. I have written fully, because I think you will want to know just what the situation is. So far as I can tell I shall remain in Princeton. My house

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(as you know) is ever at the disposal of yourself and your friends and I hope and pray it will not be long before you find occasion to make use of it. Until then, my dear John, I am

“ ‘Yours affectionately,

“ ‘LYDIA LEONARD.’ ”

John folded the letter when he had finished reading it and placed it in the pocket of his coat. Then he placed his elbows upon his knees, rested his face in his hands and stared in gloomy silence at the ground. Neither of his companions spoke.

“They call that war,” exclaimed John suddenly. “What a way to wage it.” He clenched his fists and shut his eyes.

“I suppose they’ve visited my farm too,” said Samuel Smith in an even, quiet voice. “They didn’t find much.”

“What good does it do to burn fruit trees and fences and furniture?” demanded John heatedly. “That kind of business doesn’t win wars.”

“They may think they’ll frighten people into submission,” suggested Edward.

“And they’re dead wrong,” cried John.

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“When a man doesn’t fight fair he only enrages his opponent and strengthens his will to win.”

“Exactly so,” Samuel Smith agreed. “Take my own case as an example. I have always believed in the justice of our cause and have been willing to fight for it. After hearing Mrs. Leonard’s account of what the British and Hessians are doing in my own neighborhood I am not only willing but eager to fight twice as hard and twice as long as I was before.”

“Do you suppose they have damaged Nassau Hall?” said Edward.

“Not a doubt of it,” John exclaimed, “and to think that we went away and left a portrait of King George hanging on the walls.”

“We’ll take it down before long,” said Samuel Smith.

“What do you mean?” demanded John.

“Simply this,” observed Samuel Smith coolly, “that in my opinion the tide has turned in our favor. I fully believe that in the not far distant future we are going to drive the enemy just as they have been driving us for the past few months. They under-estimated our strength, and they guessed wrong as to our ability to carry on the fight. We showed them

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at Trenton what we can do, and mark my words we'll show them again."

"I hope you're right," said John with a sigh.

"I know I'm right," said Samuel Smith shortly.

"We've only got about five thousand men."

"And the British have twice as many, all seasoned troops, the equal of any in the world, I know," said Samuel Smith. "But this is the difference: we are fighting for our homes and our families and our country; they are not. Half of their men question the justice of what their German-born king is trying to do, and the result is they are only half-hearted, and they do not believe in their cause. No man can accomplish anything in this world unless he believes in it heart and soul. That's the difference between the British and the Continental armies, and that is the thing that is going to win the war for us."

"I certainly hope you're right," said John.

"I repeat," said Samuel Smith, "I know I'm right."

He rose to his feet. "Hello, Arthur," he called to a soldier hurrying by. "Where're you going in such a rush?"

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Arthur Tryon stopped and looked at the three friends grouped on the steps of the house. Then he approached the spot where they were standing.

“Haven’t you heard the news?” he inquired.

“What news?” demanded John.

“My but you people are slow,” exclaimed Arthur laughingly. “I thought every one knew by this time.”

“Tell us. Tell us,” urged John eagerly.

“Well,” said Arthur, “I just heard that one of General Washington’s scouting parties has returned with the report that Cornwallis is on his way South with eight thousand men.”

The eyes of his three listeners gleamed at this news and with bated breath they waited for more.

“What is General Washington going to do?” asked Samuel Smith.

“He hasn’t confided all his plans to me,” said Arthur with a laugh, “but I hear he intends to cross the river again at Trenton.”

“You hear that?” cried Samuel Smith, turning exultingly to John and Edward. “I told you the tide had turned. What do we care if they have got eight thousand men? We’re

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going back into New Jersey and what's more we're going to get New Jersey back. That sounds like a pun, but believe me I mean it seriously."

His enthusiasm was infectious and the others were presently as excited as he. The rumor Arthur had brought proved to be founded on fact too, for presently preparations were once more under way to recross the Delaware.

"And when we get over there we'll keep an eye on our friend Robinson," said Edward. "We'll check up on him this time."

He looked at John, who merely nodded his head shortly, but his eyes took on a hard light which showed that he understood.

CHAPTER XVI

ON THE SKIRMISH LINE

ON the morning of January 2, 1777, John Stirling found himself lying behind a fallen tree on the south bank of a small stream known as Five Mile Run, on the Princeton road about four miles out of Trenton. Beside him was Samuel Smith. On his other side was Edward Nash, and next to Edward, Thomas Leonard. Behind the trunk of a tree farther up the stream he saw Edward Robinson, ex-steward of the College of New Jersey. Arthur Tryon was not with the regiment. He had great ability as a scout and was usually employed in work of that nature when the army was in the field.

It was about nine o'clock in the morning. Captain Robbins was walking up and down behind the positions, encouraging his men, occasionally stopping to talk with one of them for a moment, to give an order or to be of assistance with a bit of advice. The British were expected

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at any moment. Two farmers mounted on swift horses had brought word into camp that Cornwallis had left Princeton that morning and was leading his army to Trenton with the avowed intention of driving Washington into the Delaware.

“Where is our main army posted?” John inquired of Samuel Smith. “In Trenton, I suppose.”

“South of Trenton, I think,” said Samuel Smith. “I heard some one say that our main positions are south of the village, behind the Assunpinck Creek.”

“And our task here is to hold the enemy up as much as possible, I reckon.”

“That’s as I understand it.”

A tense feeling of excitement pervaded the little detachment of Continentals. Every one seemed to feel that great events were impending, and that possibly the fate of the Thirteen Colonies rested on the shoulders of George Washington’s ragged little army that day. The faces of the men were pale, but they were determined.

“Here they come.”

The word was passed rapidly along the line.

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Every man cocked his rifle and set himself for the shock.

But nothing happened.

A deer had crossed the road ahead and some excited Continental, expecting to see redcoats, had mistaken the first living thing he had seen for the enemy. The men settled down for a further period of waiting.

The minutes dragged by like hours. The air was cold, the little stream in front of them was filled with ice, fingers began to grow numb, and the men became chilled through and through. An uncanny silence settled down upon them. A bluejay flashed shrieking through the tree-tops now and then, and the gentle breeze rustled the brown leaves of the oak trees, but there was nothing else to disturb the quiet.

Samuel Smith leaned over towards John.

"I have a conundrum for you," he whispered.

"What?"

"Why is our army like an oak leaf?"

John shook his head in token of ignorance.

"Because it hangs on all winter."

John wondered how a man could joke under such conditions. Personally he was more nervous than he had ever been in his life. It was a

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trying situation to sit and wait for a vastly superior force to come up and attack. He knew the enemy would have cannon, and the detachment of Continentals under Colonel Hand of the Pennsylvania riflemen stationed on Five Mile Run had none. He knew that before many minutes had passed he might be dead. Frankly he was afraid. He did not want to die. He was young and he loved life and there were so many things he wanted to do.

His mouth felt dry and he had difficulty in swallowing. A sickly feeling persisted in the pit of his stomach, and his arms and legs seemed devoid of all strength. He gritted his teeth hard and gripped his rifle. He was afraid, certainly. But he was going to do his duty to the utmost of his ability.

“Here they come.”

This time the warning proved to be authentic. A confused murmur of sound came to the ears of the waiting riflemen. It was utterly unlike any sound John had ever heard before and for a time he was puzzled to identify it. Suddenly it dawned upon him. The noise he heard was caused by the thousands of footfalls of an army on the march.

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“Don’t waste your shots,” Captain Robbins cautioned them. “Fire when you can do the most good and then fall back.”

Through an opening in the woods John ’spied a splash of red,—the advance guard of Cornwallis’ army. Faintly he heard the rumble of cannon wheels, while the sound of the footbeats grew steadily louder.

“Crack,” came the report of a rifle, instantly followed by the rattle of musketry fire all along the line.

John could see the redcoats plainly now. A company of them had appeared in the road ahead and he saw two of them fall. He took careful aim and fired. Samuel Smith’s rifle spoke almost at the same instant. The British scurried from their exposed position in the center of the road back into the woods and returned an answering volley. John could hear the bullets cutting through the trees about him. He felt calmer now. As he started to reload his rifle he glanced at the men about him. Some were aiming their guns preparatory to firing, while others like himself were reloading in feverish haste.

He saw Robinson take aim and fire. It

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seemed to John that his aim must be too high and the old suspicion flashed through his mind, and he wondered if he was purposely aiming so as to waste his shot. But he had no time to think about such things for more than a moment. The enemy fire was becoming hotter every minute and presently Captain Robbins gave the order to retire.

The Continental riflemen had temporarily halted the British advance, thus giving themselves a chance to retire to previously chosen positions south of the Shabbakong Creek, a little stream flowing into the Assunpinck Creek two miles north of Trenton. The men scurried through the woods, dodging from tree to tree like Indians, and making all possible speed.

The north bank of the Shabbakong was lined with open meadows while on the south side there were thick woods, with the road to Trenton running through the center of them. Colonel Hand divided his force into two parts, stationing half of his men in the woods on one side of the road with the second half in the woods on the other side. Once again the Continentals stationed themselves behind trees, stumps and thickets, and, availing themselves of every bit

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of cover that offered itself, quietly waited for the enemy to come up.

“We’ll worry them when they get as far as this,” said Samuel Smith. “They won’t know how many of us there are and won’t know what to do.”

“Perhaps they’ll leave it to their artillery to find out,” said John grimly.

“You mean they’ll turn the cannon on us before they attack?”

“Exactly.”

The answer to this problem was soon given. Only a few moments elapsed before the advance guard of the British emerged from the woods and started across the meadow on the north side of the creek. They marched in perfect order. John could not help but admire them as they swung along, and with a wry smile he compared their appearance with that of the ragged, undisciplined army of which he was a member.

“No one will fire until the enemy are within three hundred feet of the creek,” ordered Captain Robbins, passing rapidly along the line. “Captain Miller’s men on the left hand side of the road are to fire first. After their volley

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every man is to count ten, and then let 'em have it."

These last few words he snapped out sharply, and every man set himself tensely for the task ahead.

On came the British. Line upon line they swung along like the regular waves of the sea. John unconsciously compared them with the waves at low tide on the Jersey sea coast, that broke far out on the bar and then ran along smoothly and in even rows towards the shore. On they came.

"What a target!" Samuel Smith whispered eagerly.

On they came. There was something relentless in their appearance, John thought. They looked irresistible, and for a moment it seemed to him that General Washington was presumptuous in ever thinking his army was a match for these seasoned world veterans. On they came, nearer and nearer. Save for the muffled tread of their feet on the frozen meadow, there was not a sound to be heard. The winter sun shone down brightly, and so far as appearances went this British army might have been on dress parade.



THE AIR WAS FILLED WITH THE SMELL OF BURNT POWDER

ON THE SKIRMISH LINE

“Fire!”

The sharp, curt command brought John back to realities with a start. From across the road came the bark of a hundred rifles. The enemy came to an abrupt halt. Men in the front rank dropped their rifles, sank limply to the ground, and lay sprawled out in grotesque, unnatural positions.

“Fire!”

The rifles of the men on John's side of the road spat forth their leaden messages of death and more gaps appeared in the British lines. A moment later the firing became general. The Continentals loaded and fired, loaded and fired, just as fast as they could. The smoke curled up through the trees, and the air was filled with the smell of burnt powder. The British meanwhile had returned the fusillade, but they could not see what they were shooting at, while they themselves were in full view of the hidden Continental marksmen.

“Here come their cannon,” cried Samuel Smith suddenly.

The British apparently considered it necessary to prepare for a regular battle. They were forming their men in solid line and the artillery

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was being rushed forward. Colonel Hand had seen this too, and immediately gave the order to retire, having no desire to expose his men to needless peril.

“We’ve delayed them some more,” panted John as he hurried along between Samuel Smith and Edward. “That apparently is what we are supposed to do.”

“I reckon that’s our job,” said Samuel Smith. “Some of their men have been delayed from ever reaching Trenton.”

Colonel Hand at their head, the detachment marched rapidly along. Back of them they could hear the British scouring the woods with their artillery, and the noise of grape shot and ball as they ripped their way through the trees.

“They’re going to kill a lot of trees,” said Samuel Smith with a chuckle. “I wish I could be on hand after the cannonade to watch them charge our positions and see how surprised they’re going to be to find us gone.”

“That would be fun,” cried Edward. “By the way, look at old Robinson over there. He seems to be in an awful hurry.”

“Perhaps he’s afraid of being killed by one of his own cannon,” said John dryly.

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“Meaning British cannon of course?”

“Of course.”

“Look here,” cried Samuel Smith suddenly. They had progressed to within a mile of the village of Trenton and were just crossing a steep little ravine which traversed the road at right angles. On the south side of the gully a considerable force of Continentals was established, evidently waiting for Cornwallis’ army to come up.

“Virginia troops,” announced Samuel Smith as they drew closer. “There’s Captain Forrest’s battery too. Johnnie Bull is due for a hot reception all along the line apparently.”

“They’re still bombarding our positions back there,” said John. “Just listen to them.”

“They’re wasting ammunition too,” said Edward.

Colonel Hand led his detachment straight on into the village, across the bridge over the Assunpinck and took his position in a small clump of trees towards the right of the line. When they first arrived the sound of the cannonading was proceeding briskly. Suddenly it ceased.

“They’re charging our positions now, I guess,” exclaimed Samuel Smith. “I’d give

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half my farm to be there and see them. What a joke on Cornwallis.”

“Pretty soon they’ll strike the Virginians,” said John. “Captain Forrest with his battery can give them some real trouble.”

“There goes that brass three pounder of his now,” cried Samuel Smith. “I know it’s voice. I can tell it anywhere.” He chuckled to himself and seemed in high spirits.

“Let’s climb one of these trees,” he exclaimed. Maybe we can see what is going on.”

A tall pine was close at hand and a moment later Samuel Smith was swinging himself up from limb to limb as nimbly as a black bear. John followed close behind him, and presently they were ensconced near the top of the tree, and from this point of vantage commanded a clear view of Queen Street, down which the British army was certain to advance.

“Captain Forrest is certainly giving them a hearty welcome,” said Samuel Smith. “I imagine his job is only to delay though, just the same as ours was.”

“They are retreating now. There are Colonel Hitchcock’s New Englanders marching up Queen Street to meet them,” exclaimed John.

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“You’re right. Here come the Virginia troops and Forrest’s battery,” cried Samuel Smith. “Look down below. Look at the cannon being wheeled up to command the bridge over the Assunpinck down there.”

“To cover the retreat.”

“And keep the British from crossing the bridge.”

As the tired Virginians fell back down Queen Street, Hitchcock’s brigade opened its ranks to allow them to pass through on their way to the bridge. When the last man had passed through safely they closed their ranks again and began to retire slowly themselves, fighting every step of the way, hard pressed by the advancing British.

“Look,” cried John, “the British are throwing out parties to the right and left and they’re firing at our men from between the houses on both sides of the street.”

“We’d better climb down, I guess,” said Samuel Smith. “It looks as if they’ll be needing our services in a few more minutes.”

The Virginians and Captain Forrest’s battery dashed across the bridge. Hitchcock’s brigade was not far distant, but their progress

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was slow and the British were pressing them on three sides. As John and Samuel Smith reached the ground and started to rejoin their comrades of the Middlesex Regiment there was a shout and they turned in time to see two detachments of British, one from each side, rushing madly for the bridge to get behind Hitchcock and cut off his retreat.

At that moment, however, the Continental cannon on the south bank of the Assunpinck opened up on them with such a murderous fire that they were quickly obliged to abandon this attempt and retire in disorder, leaving many of their men lying dead or wounded in the street. Colonel Hitchcock thereupon led his men hurriedly over the bridge and took up his position in a meadow at the right of the line. The firing died away.

“Is the fighting all over?” exclaimed John in surprise.

“Not in my opinion,” said Samuel Smith. “My guess is that before night comes, and that’s not very distant, Cornwallis will bring up his entire army and try to rush our positions.”

CHAPTER XVII

A FORCED MARCH

THE afternoon was fast wearing away. On the south bank of the Assunpinck there was feverish activity. Every member of the Continental Army, from General Washington down to the humblest private, fully expected that it was only a question of hours, perhaps of minutes, before Cornwallis would attack. He had a vastly superior force, and the creek offered him no serious obstacle. His army was composed of seasoned regulars, while the Continentals opposed to him were for the most part untried amateurs at the game of war. But the Continentals worked like beavers, nevertheless, throwing up earthworks and strengthening their fortifications, resolved to furnish as much opposition as possible.

“It looks bad for us,” said Samuel Smith gloomily. “But one thing is sure, and that is that we’ll make them always remember they

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had a real battle." He shut his jaws with a snap.

"You think they'll attack, don't you?" said John. "I do."

"They're foolish if they don't, said Samuel Smith. "We've got the Delaware River behind us and it seems to me they've got a chance to end the war right now. We're trapped, John, I'm afraid."

He fell to work with his pick, loosening up the frozen ground for John to throw up on the earthworks in front with his spade. All along the south bank of the creek this same operation was going on.

"If they don't drive us into the Delaware," said Samuel Smith presently, "the only thing left for us is to retreat along the bank of the river and that leads to the ocean. We can't swim the ocean. We're trapped. We should never have crossed the Delaware again."

"Only yesterday you were saying the tide had turned in our favor," said John. "Now you seem to have lost all hope."

"They're too many for us, John."

He swung his pick vigorously and in silence.

"Understand me," he exclaimed a moment

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later, "I'm not afraid, and I've made up my mind never to be taken alive. I do think, though, that our cause is lost."

Most of the men seemed to share this view. They were heavy-hearted, and being worn out physically their spirits were correspondingly low. They still worked hard strengthening their fortifications, but their manner suggested that they considered themselves the victims of a forlorn hope. Frequent anxious glances were cast across the creek in the direction of the British encampment, every man expecting momentarily to see the enemy advancing to the attack.

But the shadows lengthened and the January sun sank lower and lower in the western sky, and the expected attack was not forthcoming.

"What are they waiting for?" John demanded.

"Maybe they'll wait till morning," said Samuel Smith. "They must know they've got us trapped and possibly they think that if they wait until to-morrow their men will be fresher. They've done a lot of work themselves to-day. They've marched all the way from Princeton and they must be almost as tired as we are."

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“They couldn’t be,” said John with a wry smile. “My hands are blistered, my back aches like a sore tooth, and I’m so weary I feel as if I could go to sleep right here standing up.”

Dusk settled down over the camp, and still the British did not attack. Gradually it became the consensus of opinion that the battle would not be fought until the following day, and when the earthworks were completed and orders given to cease work, the tired Continentals dropped their tools, and many of them stretched out on the cold ground wherever they happened to be and fell asleep.

John, Samuel Smith, Edward and Thomas were among those who tried to get some rest in this way. They did take the precaution, however, of obtaining blankets before stretching out on the ground, for none of them had any desire to add sickness to his list of troubles.

They were too tired to worry about Robinson. They were too tired to worry about the British, and in spite of the fact that they expected a battle the following day and each one knew that he might not survive it, that thought was not sufficient to keep them awake.

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It seemed to John that he had scarcely closed his eyes when he felt himself rudely shaken.

“Wake up, John,” he heard Samuel Smith say.

John merely grunted.

“Wake up,” Samuel Smith repeated excitedly.

John sat up and rubbed his eyes dazedly. It was black night, and for a moment he was unable to collect his thoughts and remember where he was.

“Get up,” Samuel Smith urged him. “We’re moving.”

The cold night air in his face revived him somewhat and John staggered to his feet. He remembered now where he was, and his brain cleared instantly. He became wide awake and alert at once. All along the bank of the Assunpinck he saw the watch fires burning and squads of Continental soldiers hurrying towards them with fence rails, logs and all the available firewood they could find. In the distance, across the creek, he could see the yellow glow of the watch fires of the British.

“What’s up?” he demanded.

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"We're moving," said Samuel Smith.

"Who is?"

"The army."

"Where?"

"I don't know."

"Where are Edward and Thomas?"

"They're right here. Are you fully awake?"

"Absolutely," said John. "Where's Arthur? Is he back yet?"

"Haven't seen him. I heard he was scouting towards Princeton, and I guess he couldn't get back through the British lines."

"Where are we going?"

"I don't know," said Samuel Smith. "The army is about to move, that's all I can say."

Soldiers were hurrying about in all directions. The various commands were being collected together and everywhere was the most feverish activity. But everything was being done as silently as possible. Orders were given in low tones, and talking above a whisper in the ranks was expressly forbidden.

"That you, John?"

"Hello, Edward. What's up?"

They had found their regiment and dropped into their proper places. Edward always was

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on John's left and Samuel Smith on his right.

"We're leaving here."

"I know that," whispered John testily.

"What I want to find out is where we're going to."

"To Princeton, I understand."

"What?" demanded John in amazement.

"That's what I hear."

"You hear that, Samuel?"

"I do," said Samuel Smith, "and the news, if true, is the best I have ever heard in all my life."

"How are we going to get through the British?" John inquired of Edward. "They haven't left, have they? Of course not."

"We're not going through them, we're going around them."

A battery of cannon were dragged past them at that moment, the wheels wrapped in old cloths so as to make no sound. The boys stopped whispering and peered at the guns and their crews as they lumbered by.

"We're taking our cannon," whispered John excitedly. "This is not a retreat then, but a strategic move."

"My hat!" exclaimed Samuel Smith, who

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was becoming so excited he could scarcely control his voice. "Think of what this means, boys. If we can get around in back of Cornwallis without his knowing it, we can get to Princeton before he can stop us, and maybe continue on to Brunswick, where all the British stores and provisions are located. General Washington is a marvel. No one but a marvel could have thought of such a thing. If we can get away without Cornwallis discovering us, we'll make him the sorriest man you ever heard of."

Samuel Smith was just as jubilant now as he had been downcast that afternoon. His spirits were up, his confidence had returned, and he was impatient to be off. Nor did he have long to wait.

The order to move came presently, and the regiment started on its night march to Princeton. They moved in absolute silence, orders having been given that until further notice there was to be no talking whatsoever. The pace was slow, for at the start there was no road to follow and the way was difficult through the woods. Every little while they halted, and then they would move forward, only to be halted

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again after a little more distance had been covered. The Continental watch fires gradually faded into oblivion, and after an hour of halting and going ahead they turned into a road leading to the left.

Captain Robbins walked beside Edward, who was on the end of the line.

“You recognize this road?” he asked, knowing that Edward’s home was in Trenton, and thinking him probably familiar with the country ’roundabout.

“The Sandtown road,” said Edward. “I know it well. If we’re going to Princeton we’ll probably turn off before we get to Sandtown though and take the crossroad leading to the west of Princeton.”

“That’s what I thought,” said Captain Robbins.

The restriction against talking had been removed, but the majority of the men were so tired they had little inclination to say anything, and the march was continued mostly in silence. Every little while the column was halted, as difficulties were encountered in getting the cannon over the narrow wagon track that served as a road. And every time the column halted

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there were men in each platoon who fell sound asleep, standing on their feet and leaning on their rifles. When the command to advance would come, many of these sleepers would not hear it, and the platoon behind, unable to see them in the darkness, would walk into them and they would trip over their rifles and fall to the ground.

Fortunately the weather had turned cold during the early part of the night and the ground had become frozen. For several days previous it had been quite warm, and the roads had been muddy and well-nigh impassable for artillery. The sudden frost was of incalculable assistance to Washington's army.

"Is Robinson with us?" Edward whispered to Captain Robbins.

"No. I assigned him to sentry duty to-night, thinking it just as well to leave him behind."

"He's back by the Assunpinck, then?"

"Yes. We left enough men to keep the fires burning brightly and to pace up and down as sentries so that the British will have no suspicion that our camp has been deserted."

"Will Robinson stay there?"

"I figured it would be more difficult for him

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to disappear from there than to leave us here on the road without being discovered. One or two others will keep their eyes on him.”

“Has Arthur Tryon returned?”

“No, he hasn’t,” said Captain Robbins. “I hope nothing has happened to him.”

“He’s fairly capable of looking out for himself,” said Edward.

“Indeed he is,” Captain Robbins agreed. “I’m not really worrying about him. I expect he couldn’t get back through the British lines.”

They plodded onward in silence. The members of the Middlesex Regiment had no idea what position they occupied in the line. They knew that the army extended far ahead of them and stretched out far behind, but further they only knew that they were part of a tired, weary procession of soldiers, almost exhausted physically, but mentally strong and imbued with the resolve to dare all and endure all.

As Edward had predicted a turn was taken to the left before they came to Sandtown, and they bore away in the direction of Princeton. The road opened up a bit at this point and the traveling became easier. The pace, however, was quickened and halts became less and less

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frequent. Time was of the utmost importance, because the minute day broke and Cornwallis discovered he had been tricked, he and his whole army would be on their way to Princeton at top speed. Washington knew he could not possibly oppose such an army and the whole success of his movement lay in reaching Princeton and disposing of the comparatively small British force there before Lord Cornwallis had an opportunity to bring his main army into action.

Dawn was not far distant. The stars were commencing to pale and the countryside began to take on that soft gray glow that precedes the coming of the sun. The men were marching doggedly on, stumbling and tripping through sheer weariness, and scarcely a word was spoken.

Suddenly John grasped Samuel Smith by the arm.

“Look there,” he exclaimed, pointing across the fields in the direction of Trenton.

A figure on horseback could be dimly seen riding at top speed towards the advancing Continental Army.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE VOICE AGAIN

THE Continental Army at the time the horseman was discovered was passing Bear Swamp, headed for the Quaker Road, the highway used by the Society of Friends in going from Crosswicks to the Stony Brook Meeting House on the outskirts of the village of Princeton.

The horseman raced across the fields, lifted his horse over a high rail fence with all the skill of a steeplechase rider, and approached the army on its left flank. Hundreds of eyes were turned curiously in the direction of the mysterious rider.

"It's a negro," exclaimed Edward, always noted for his sharp eyesight.

"Sure enough," said John. "Who can he be? A messenger, I suppose."

Nearer and nearer came the rider. He seemed to be headed straight for the position in the line held by the Middlesex Regiment, and presently he drew rein in front of Captain Robbins.

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“Ah’s lookin’ foah de Middlesex Reg’ment,” he exclaimed, extremely short of breath.

“Here it is,” said Captain Robbins. “We can’t stop. Walk your horse along beside us and tell me what you want.”

“Is dis de Middlesex Reg’ment?” said the colored rider in surprise. “What yo’ know about mah fin’in’ it der first crack?”

“That’s Mr. Hunt’s colored servant,” Samuel Smith exclaimed suddenly to John. “The one who told me about the man in the uniform of our regiment coming to see Colonel Rall on Christmas night. Do you remember?”

“Indeed I do remember,” said John. “What can he be doing here?”

It had grown quite light, and it was now possible to recognize faces. The negro on the horse was looking eagerly at every one in that part of the line, and presently his eyes rested upon Samuel Smith. Evidently he was the man he was searching for.

“Dere’s Mistah Smif,” he exclaimed. “Could I talk with him, Cap’n?”

Captain Robbins looked around at Samuel Smith, and beckoned him out of the line. A moment later, Samuel Smith on one side of

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the horse and Captain Robbins on the other, the three men were engaged in earnest conversation. John, Edward and Thomas could not hear what was being said and were obliged to wait until Samuel Smith should resume his place and report to them. For a full ten minutes the negro talked busily to his two listeners, they interrupting him occasionally with a question.

Presently he and Captain Robbins hurried on ahead, and Samuel Smith resumed his place at John's right. His brow was wrinkled and a scowl was on his face.

"Well?" said John, unable to restrain his curiosity.

"Bad business," said Samuel Smith, shaking his head.

"What's happened?" demanded John in alarm. "Tell us."

"That negro is Mr. Hunt's servant as I told you," said Samuel Smith. "His story is a remarkable one." He lowered his voice. "Last night his master—who, by the way, seems to be an out and out Tory now—took him to the house where Lord Cornwallis has his headquarters. That in itself is not so re-

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markable, but the reason for Mr. Hunt's going there is.

“It seems that at about half past ten last night—an hour after we started, remember that—a man came to Mr. Hunt's house and knocked on the door. This servant opened it for him, and noticed that he wore the uniform of our regiment. The man stood in the shadow where the negro could not see his face, but the minute he spoke he knew it was the same man who had come to the house with the message for Colonel Rall on Christmas night. He says he had the same high-pitched voice and talked through his nose and there is no chance of his having mistaken him.

“The man wanted to see Mr. Hunt, and when the servant called his master the negro says he just couldn't help eavesdropping. Mr. Hunt stepped out onto the porch and he listened inside at the door. ‘They're breaking camp,’ he heard the soldier say, ‘and they're starting for Princeton.’ That much he heard distinctly, and is ready to swear to it. He only heard snatches of the remainder of the conversation, but he had heard enough to acquaint him with what was transpiring.

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“Presently, he says, he heard the informer moving away and he hurried off to the kitchen so his master wouldn’t find him listening by the door. A few moments later Mr. Hunt came out to the kitchen, looking for him, and ordered him to get his coat and accompany him to Lord Cornwallis’ headquarters.

“When they got there Mr. Hunt left him outside and so he heard nothing of the conversation between Mr. Hunt and Lord Cornwallis, but he supposes—and of course he’s right—that his master was giving Cornwallis the news he had just received from our friend with the nasal voice. He himself passed the time talking with a sentry outside the house, and the soldier told him how as soon as the sun rose this morning they were going to drive the rebels out of their positions and into either the Delaware River or the Atlantic Ocean, he didn’t care which.”

Samuel Smith paused for a moment. “What do you think about it all?” he demanded angrily.

“I for one think that somebody ought to be hanged for a spy,” exclaimed John.

“And that some one is?”

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“Robinson,” said John in a low voice.

“It must be,” said Edward eagerly. “The man went to Mr. Hunt’s an hour after the army had left camp. Robinson was left behind to act as sentry and he must have stolen across the creek and hurried up to Mr. Hunt with the news just as fast as he could.”

“Why should he have gone to Mr. Hunt?” said John. “Why didn’t he go straight to Lord Cornwallis?”

“That’s what I said,” Samuel Smith exclaimed. “Captain Robbins explained that though, I think. He said that probably Robinson was working hand in glove with Mr. Hunt, that Hunt undoubtedly sold his information to the British and was known to them, and that Robinson considered it easier and simpler to pass the news on through the usual channel.”

“Captain Robbins doesn’t think Robinson is a regular British spy then?”

“No, he considers him something worse, a man who for money will betray his own people, a man who will work with the enemy when the occasion demands it, as for instance when he followed you to the Van Pelts’ in order to capture the message you were carrying, but

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not regularly enrolled in the British army.”

“Not a spy, then, but a traitor,” observed Edward.

“Exactly.”

“I intend to accuse him to his face the next time I see him,” exclaimed Edward hotly.

“Tell us what happened next,” said John, interested in the story.

“Well, as I was saying,” Samuel Smith continued, “the negro servant—his name is Tom—waited outside for Mr. Hunt. Presently he came out and they went back home. Tom meanwhile, who is a loyal patriot and who has done a little spying on his own account right in his own house, was fearful lest the news his master had conveyed to Lord Cornwallis would ruin all our plans. He resolved to steal one of his master’s horses, ride for all he was worth towards Princeton and give us warning.”

“And he looked for the Middlesex Regiment because that was the kind of uniform Robinson wore,” Edward explained.

“Yes,” said Samuel Smith, “that’s right. As a matter of fact he did not have to steal one of Mr. Hunt’s horses, however. Everything worked out beautifully for him. When

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they got home Mr. Hunt informed him that he was sending him upon an important and dangerous errand. Tom couldn't guess what it was and when his master told him it was to ride to Princeton immediately he was so surprised and overjoyed that he was afraid he would show it in his face and ruin everything."

"Mr. Hunt must trust him," said John.

"Absolutely. Well, the upshot of it all was that Mr. Hunt handed him a message to be delivered to Colonel Mawhood, provided him with a safe conduct through the lines signed by one of Cornwallis' aides who seemed inclined to believe the story, put him on his best horse and told him to ride for his life."

"I wonder Mr. Hunt didn't go himself," said John.

"He trusted Tom implicitly," said Samuel Smith, and he added with a laugh, "Tom himself says he is a better horseman than his master. No doubt he's right and that would explain it."

"Who is Colonel Mawhood?" inquired Edward.

"The British commander at Princeton. Cap-

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tain Robbins opened the note Tom had and found it a warning that our army was on its way to attack him."

"Written by Lord Cornwallis?" asked John.

"No, by Mr. Hunt. It's barely possible that Cornwallis didn't believe Hunt's story, for Tom says his master seemed to be awfully upset about something when he came out from his interview and kept muttering and cursing under his breath all the way home."

"Let us hope he didn't believe it," exclaimed John fervently. "That would help us a great deal."

Captain Robbins returned to their place in the line at that moment and signaled Samuel Smith, Edward and John to step out of the ranks.

"Special work for you three," he explained. "I presume you are familiar with the lay of the land around Princeton."

"I know every inch of it," said Samuel Smith. "I love every particle of it too. I was born the other side of yonder hill and my father before me, and that's where my home is now. I should say I did know it."

"We've walked over it all enough to know

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it in our sleep almost, haven't we, Edward?" John exclaimed. "Indeed we have."

"Just as I thought," said Captain Robbins. "Come along."

They hurried forward towards the head of the column, which was dimly to be seen in the faint light, just approaching the bridge over Stony Brook the other side of which was the Quaker Meeting House.

"The main column is to take the back road," Captain Robbins explained. "You three are to accompany General Mercer, who has with him portions of the Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania brigades and a couple of field pieces under Captain Neal. He may need you as guides."

They caught up with General Mercer's brigade just as it was crossing Stony Brook. On the east bank they left the main army and turned to the left, taking the road which runs parallel to the stream.

"Know where we're going?" John inquired of a burly backwoodsman beside him.

"To tear down the Post Road bridge, I hear," the man replied sulkily. "Personally I'd rather sleep."

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John relayed the information about the bridge to Samuel Smith.

“Of course,” that individual exclaimed, “the idea being to make it more difficult for Cornwallis to catch up with us, once he gets started in pursuit. The bridge down would hold him up for quite a while. I reckon he’s found out by now—if he didn’t believe it last night—that Mr. Hunt told the truth, and you can wager your last shilling that he’ll be hotfooting it towards Princeton. He’ll take the Post Road, of course, that being the shortest route. I kind of hate to tear down the old bridge, because it has been a good friend of mine, but I suppose it must be done.”

At that moment a horseman came tearing along the road behind them, riding at break-neck speed. As he came alongside the column headed by Mercer he shouted at the top of his voice.

“The British,” he cried and pointed ahead in the direction of Worth’s Mill and the bridge over Stony Brook. “The British are coming back across the bridge to head you off.”

CHAPTER XIX

THE FIGHT IN THE ORCHARD

GENERAL MERCER immediately halted his column and as the messenger came up with him, he questioned him closely. A moment later orders were given and the column left the road and hastened as fast as they could go in the direction of the high ground to their right.¹

No one thought of sleep now. Weariness and fatigue were forgotten. The enemy was at hand. The battle was about to be joined.

"Can it be Cornwallis here so quickly?" panted John as they struggled up the hill at right angles to Stony Brook.

"Not possibly," exclaimed Samuel Smith. "Mawhood must have been on his way to Trenton, seen us and turned back."

As they reached the top of the hill they could see the leading brigade of the Continental Army—General Sullivan's division—proceeding along the back road towards the heights,

¹ Mercer Heights.

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parallel to the course they themselves were following. Ahead of them was an apple orchard and their way lay under the trees. So far they had seen nothing of the enemy, but every man seemed to sense their proximity.

They entered the orchard. They were marching at quick time now, in a westerly direction, and with General Mercer at their head were making all possible speed to join up with General Sullivan.

Suddenly from behind a fence on their left and on the edge of the orchard there came the sharp bark of a volley of musketry fire, and a rain of shot ripped through the branches over their heads.

“Left wheel,” shouted General Mercer without a moment’s hesitation. “Forward at quick time, march!”

With a shout the Continentals dashed forward. The enemy could now be seen behind a bank and a fence at the edge of the orchard. The Continentals wheeled into line, poured a volley into the ranks of the British, and then continued their advance.

The British fell back hastily.

A roar from Mercer’s men greeted this with-

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drawal and they ran at full speed towards the fence lately held by the enemy. This fence offered the best protection of anything in the neighborhood.

“They’re running,” shouted John excitedly, and he fell on one knee and proceeded to reload his musket with buckshot and ball.

The British did run, but not far. Their packs had been left lying in a line about fifty yards distant; they retreated to that spot, threw themselves upon their stomachs, and using the packs for protection returned the fire of the Continentals.

General Mercer had been mounted on a handsome gray horse, but one of the enemy’s bullets struck it in the foreleg and he was obliged to abandon it. He ran up and down behind his men, encouraging them and directing their fire. And their fire was most destructive. Gaps appeared in the British ranks and it began to look as if victory was well within Mercer’s grasp.

“Give it to ’em, John,” cried Samuel Smith, his face grimy with powder smoke. “They’re weakening.”

His statement seemed to be true, but at that moment a large reënforcement of British ap-

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peared over the crest of the rise of ground in the rear, and hurried forward to join their comrades. Squads of them were dragging two field pieces with them, and a moment later they were in position on a small knoll where stood a solitary oak tree, on the right of the British line. Almost directly opposite this spot Captain Neal had placed his two pieces, on the Continental left, just beyond the northwest corner of the orchard.

The British reënforcements consisted of Colonel Mawhood himself, the 17th regiment of infantry, part of the 55th, and fifty light horse.

“Now for a real fight,” cried Samuel Smith.

The field pieces were soon in action and both sides were raked with canister and ball. The air was filled with the smoke of battle, mingled with the hoarse commands of the officers, the shouts of the men, and the groans of the wounded.

One man, on John's left, rose to his feet, leaned his rifle on the top of the fence and took careful aim. Before he could fire, a ball from a British musket struck him over the right eye and he crumpled to the ground, dead. The fence in front of the spot where John, Edward

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and Samuel Smith were located was torn away by a charge of canister. The British rifle fire was increasing in intensity every moment. The Continentals were badly outnumbered, and presently their line began to waver.

A pale-faced soldier next to Edward suddenly sprang to his feet, threw down his rifle, turned his back to the enemy and ran through the orchard as fast as his legs could carry him. Presently another man did the same thing. Others began to look anxiously about them as if for some avenue of escape.

The redcoats were quick to see the irresolution of the Continentals, and with a shout they rushed forward, bayonets fixed. Mercer's men waited for no more, but turned and fled. Colonel Haslet of the Delaware Continentals was racing up and down like a crazy man, begging, threatening and pleading with his soldiers to stay their flight and reform their lines. It was of no use. The American resistance was broken. They scrambled pell-mell over the fence on the south side of the orchard and started up the slope beyond the outbuildings of the Thomas Clark barn.

As John, Edward and Samuel reached this

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spot they saw Colonel Haslet fall, dying, a bullet hole through his head. A few yards away Captain Neal was lying lifeless.

“Where’s General Mercer?” cried John breathlessly.

Samuel Smith stopped running and looked back.

“He’s still in the orchard,” he exclaimed, and instantly started to retrace his steps the way he had come.

The redcoats were swarming under the trees now, clubbing, stabbing and bayoneting every Continental they could find. General Mercer, clad in a surtout, was still in the orchard and as Samuel Smith raced towards him he saw him drop, struck over the head with the butt of a musket. As he fell one of the redcoats kicked him and then he shouted exultantly:

“He’s a general,” and several other British rushed up to the spot where the wounded commander lay stretched upon the ground.

“Call for quarters, you damn rebel,” one of them demanded.

“Hessian officers may surrender, but Americans never,” retorted Mercer angrily. He held his sword in his right hand and as he spoke he

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tried to rise to his feet, and lunged at his assailants with it. Immediately one of the redcoats plunged his bayonet into the wounded general lying at his feet. Mercer sank back with a groan and lay limp and defenseless on the ground, whereupon the entire party of British bayoneted him repeatedly.

At that moment Samuel Smith arrived upon the scene. John and Edward were watching him from the shelter of Mr. Clark's smoke-house. He held his rifle in his two hands, grasping it tightly by the barrel, and he swung it about his head like a flail. Never hesitating an instant he jumped fairly into the center of the group of redcoats standing over General Mercer, and with a roar like the bellow of a wounded bull began to lay about him.

His first blow sent one of the British soldiers spinning headlong against a tree. The second crushed in the head of the redcoat next to him as if it had been an eggshell. Taken completely by surprise these two men had had neither chance to escape nor to defend themselves. The others gave one look at Samuel Smith and turned and scurried away like frightened rabbits.

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Samuel Smith made no attempt to follow them. He leaned over, picked the general up in his arms, swung him over his shoulder as if he had been a bag of meal, and started after his retreating comrades as fast as his burden would permit. Up the slope he ran, past the farm outbuildings and into the farmhouse itself with his precious load.

The British meanwhile were pursuing the fleeing Continentals up the slope, and presently John and Edward were obliged to abandon their position by the smokehouse. Captain Neal's two field pieces had fallen into the hands of the British, and these together with the two they had had already, gave them four cannon to turn against the Americans.

"Where is the main army?" panted Edward as they ran.

As he spoke the head of a column of Continental troops appeared over the crest of the slope in back of the Clark farmhouse. John, Edward and the rest of Mercer's men were heading directly towards them, in full flight.

"Wait, Edward," cried John. "There's no need of running now."

They halted and looked back. The British

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too had seen the American reënforcements and checked their pursuit. There was a fence at the bottom of the slope; behind this fence the redcoats posted themselves, and opened fire with their rifles upon the militia above, for the American reënforcements consisted mostly of Pennsylvania volunteers under General Cadwalader.

“Lie down here,” cried John, and threw himself to the ground behind a large boulder in one corner of the field. Edward crouched down beside John, and from this point of vantage they had a clear view of the British below them, and were also well protected from their fire. They did not remain in this spot long, however, for a moment later a party of Continental infantry started to run full speed down the hill, aiming for the left of the British line and with the evident intention of getting behind it. At almost the same moment an American battery was trundled into position and opened fire at extremely short range on the redcoats behind the fence.

“They’ll soon leave,” John predicted excitedly. And they did. In less than five minutes the British had abandoned their posts along the

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fence and were hurrying post haste back the way they had come, to the place where the main body of their troops were stationed.

“We’d better get back to the regiment,” said John. “I wonder where Samuel is? Right there,” he exclaimed suddenly as a burly figure emerged from the farmhouse and came running rapidly in their direction.

“How’s General Mercer?” demanded John.

“Badly hurt,” said Samuel Smith shortly.

“Will he recover?”

“I doubt it.”

“Any one with him to take care of him?”

“Plenty,” said Samuel Smith. “Where’re the British?”

As he spoke a rifle ball lifted his hat from off his head and knocked him down.

John and Edward were instantly at his side.

“Are your hurt?” they demanded in one voice.

Samuel Smith sat up and rubbed his head. “No,” he growled, “but I know where the British are now.” He shook his fist in their direction. He picked his torn hat up, looked at it ruefully, and replaced it on his head.

Meanwhile General Cadwalader was trying

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to form the militia on the crest of the slope, and having an extremely difficult time of it. The British were showering them with grape shot, and being unused to artillery fire and lacking discipline he found it an almost impossible task. He was out in front of his men, trying to form the line, and attempting to get the detachments to file off, one to the right, the next one to the left, and so on alternately.

But it was of no use. It is doubtful if the militia could have performed this maneuver on the parade ground with the enemy nowhere near. Under fire it was impossible.

“Where’s the Middlesex?” demanded Samuel Smith. “Mercer’s men are scattered and I suppose our duty is to get back to our own regiment as fast as we can.”

“No sign of it,” said Edward.

“Let’s join up with that battery then,” Samuel Smith exclaimed, and indicated Captain Moulder’s battery, which had driven the British advance line back from the fence and was now stationed to the right of the farmhouse. “They seem to be closer to the British than any of the others.”

Without waiting to get the opinions of his

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young friends on this suggestion he started off at a run, and John and Edward followed. The battery was pouring a destructive fire at the British position and doing more than anything else to prevent Colonel Mawhood from leading his men in a charge on the demoralized American militia on the crest of the slope. They were still raking the Continentals with grape shot, however, and in spite of General Cadwalader's frenzied efforts his troops suddenly broke and ran.

"Here come their cavalry," shouted John.

The British, seeing the American militia retire, had immediately sent their light horse to flank the Continental army, take possession of the high ground and consolidate the position. But Captain Moulder held his ground by the farmhouse and turned his guns on the advancing horsemen. Two rounds of canister were enough and the cavalry was dispersed and forced to retire to their former position.

A moment later Captain Rodney with one hundred and fifty Continental infantrymen dashed through the British line of fire and joined forces with Captain Moulder's battery. These men kept up a continuous rifle fire on

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the enemy and with the aid of the two field pieces held them at bay.

By this time the American generals had succeeded in bringing the New England troops up from the rear to support the wavering militia. Under General Hitchcock they were advancing around the eastern end of the hill so as to get in the rear of the British left flank and envelope it. Beyond them was a company of Pennsylvania riflemen proceeding in the same direction, and with the object of carrying the flanking movement still further.

John's powder horn was empty. He had used every ounce of powder he had had and as he turned to Edward to borrow some of his he looked up towards the top of the hill and saw General George Washington himself, on a large roan horse, riding at the head of a detachment of troops, directly in the line of the British fire.

"Edward," cried John. "Look. Look, Samuel."

His two friends turned at his call.

"He'll be killed," gasped Edward in an awe-struck voice.

"He's too reckless," cried Samuel Smith, and in his voice was a sharp note of anguish.

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But Washington led his column on over the hill, seemingly unconscious of any danger, his whole attention directed to encouraging and stimulating the men who followed him. Coolly and unconcernedly he led his men on. Narrower and narrower grew the space between the opposing lines.

John felt a sickening sensation in the pit of his stomach as he saw the Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army advancing to what seemed certain death. Then he saw the line halt, while the Continental soldiers knelt and brought their muskets to their shoulders. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the British rifles leveled at the American troops opposite.

He shut his eyes, unable to bear the sight of what he felt was certain to come.

CHAPTER XX

VICTORY

It seemed to John as if the shots would never come. Hours seemed to be encompassed within the few seconds that elapsed before the expected volley was fired. And in those seconds John saw in his mind's eye a picture of General Washington laid low upon the ground, lifeless, with the army, completely demoralized at the death of their general, fleeing or throwing down their arms and surrendering. The vision made him shudder.

Then came the roar of musketry and with the crash these unpleasant pictures faded from John's mind. Still he dared not look.

Suddenly a shout of joy came to his ears. Men were cheering in a frenzy of excitement. Then John opened his eyes and discovered the reason. A cloud of smoke was rising over the battlefield, and in the center of it was General Washington, sitting on his horse, waving his

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hat in one hand, and cheering his men on to the attack.

The Continentals swept on down the hill, stopping every little while to reload and fire a volley at the enemy. General Hitchcock was on General Washington's left and the two columns kept pace.

"Come on, boys," shouted Samuel Smith, and springing to his feet he ran at top speed across the field towards the division led by General Washington. John and Edward waited for no more, but followed close at Samuel Smith's heels.

A moment later they joined up with the remnants of Mercer's and Cadwalader's brigade, the militia which by reason of their lack of discipline had almost lost the day for the Continental cause. The men were of different temper now, however. Inspired by General Washington's leadership and example, they had taken heart, their courage had returned, and they were on edge for battle.

They ran forward, then threw themselves on the ground and fired, reloaded, sprang to their feet, rushed forward again a short distance, and fired again. In this way they approached

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to within one hundred yards of the British position. Then with a shout they threw caution to the winds, and charged headlong at the enemy.

There was no stopping them now. They swept on over the British lines carrying all before them. The redcoats fell back, reformed in front of their artillery in an effort to save the field pieces, but they were outnumbered, the Continentals were filled with the fire of victory and were not to be denied. The struggle was a sharp one, but a short one, and at the finish the cannon remained in the hands of the on-rushing Americans.

The broken British army scattered to the four winds. Many of them crossed the Post Road and others sought safety by crossing Stony Brook and fleeing in the direction of Maidenhead where other British regiments were located. Detachments of Continental infantrymen took up the pursuit, and presently scores of prisoners were being rounded up and brought in.

John, Edward and Samuel Smith found themselves racing across the fields in pursuit of two flying redcoats.

General Washington rode past them.

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“What a fine fox chase it is, my boys,” he cried exultantly. “Bring in all the brushes you can find.”

The two men they were pursuing were headed for a patch of woods bordering Stony Brook. They were fleet of foot and steadily gained on the three Continentals who were following them.

“We’re going to lose them, John,” panted Edward. He was rather large to qualify as a runner and in addition he was short of breath.

Samuel Smith was ahead of the two boys. He turned and called to them.

“Cut in over there to the left and then follow along the bank of the brook,” he shouted. “It bends in those woods and I’ll go to the right and then double back, keeping close to the bank till I meet you two. We can trap them sure.”

He turned sharply to the right, and John and Edward went off to the left. The men they were chasing could be seen entering the woods about a hundred yards in advance.

“I remember this place,” John exclaimed. “There’s a sharp turn in the brook in those woods, with high, steep banks.”

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A few moments later they came to the edge of the stream. It had worn its way deep into the earth at this point and the bottom was covered with large flat stones, over which the water slipped, making the footing treacherous for any one who tried to cross. The bank twenty feet above was lined with big trees, bare of leaves now, and the woods were open, so that a clear view was afforded for a considerable distance in all directions.

“Keep behind the trees as much as you can, Edward,” cautioned John. “We don’t want these Britishers to pick us off.”

They turned to the right and started upstream.

“There they are,” cried Edward suddenly and ducked behind the roots of a fallen tree. John sprang in back of the trunk of a gnarled oak and cocked his rifle. Then he remembered that his rifle was not loaded. He had borrowed a little powder from Edward but it had all been used up. He peered cautiously around the trunk.

“That’s Samuel,” he whispered to Edward. “I don’t see the redcoats anywhere.”

Samuel Smith was coming through the woods

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in their direction, jumping from tree to tree, peering keenly all about him, and holding his rifle ready for immediate use.

Suddenly John felt a stinging sensation in his left foot and at the same instant the crack of a rifle came to his ears. His knees began to tremble and he could feel himself sinking to the ground, while his rifle began to slide from his grasp. On the opposite side of the stream a little cloud of blue smoke floated lazily skyward in the winter air and beneath it, hiding under a rock, he saw the two men they were pursuing.

“Come out of there,” he heard Samuel Smith shout. “Throw down your rifles and come out of there. Quick!”

Hot, searing pains shot up and down John's left leg. He felt sick at his stomach, and it was only by the strongest exercise of his will that he managed to hold on to the tree and keep himself from falling. The pains were in his leg; his left foot had no feeling in it whatsoever, but it was his foot that the ball had struck, for his boot had a jagged hole in it and a thin stream of blood was trickling out of the opening.

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“Come out of there, I said,” he heard Samuel Smith say once more. “Quick, too!”

All of this had taken only a moment, and almost instantly Edward had sprung to his friend’s side.

“What is it, John?” he inquired in a frightened voice.

“I’m shot.”

“Where? Show me.”

John indicated his foot, and tried to smile. The attempt was a sickly failure, however, and it was only by the narrowest of margins that he kept himself from fainting.

“Shall I take your boot off?”

“No,” said John. “Don’t touch it. I’ll be all right in a minute.”

His looks belied this statement, however. His face had grown ashen pale, and the pain in his leg seemed to increase as the minutes passed.

“Where’s Samuel?” he inquired.

“In back of you,” said Edward, “walking this way.”

John turned his head. Coming towards the spot where he lay propped against the tree were two burly redcoats, grimy with the smoke and

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dust of battle, and very angry looking. Behind them walked Samuel Smith, his rifle hanging carelessly in the hollow of his right elbow, the two rifles belonging to the redcoats in his left hand. A grin of pride was on his countenance, but this expression changed immediately to one of anxiety and concern as he observed that John was in trouble.

“What’s the matter, John?” he demanded.

“Shot in the foot,” said Edward.

“One o’ you did it,” cried Samuel Smith, turning angrily on his prisoners. “I’ve a good mind to knock you both over the head.”

The two redcoats looked nervously at the speaker as if they fully expected him to carry out his threat. Samuel Smith was no murderer, however, and presently he turned away.

“Here, Edward,” he cried. “Take this rifle and keep your eye on these two robins. If they try to run away, shoot.”

He turned to John.

“Shot in the foot, eh? Let me see it.”

John thrust out his leg.

“First of all we must get that boot off,” exclaimed Samuel Smith.

John started to protest, but it was no use.

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Samuel Smith whipped out his knife and began to cut away the leather, paying no attention to the fact that he was rapidly ruining the boot.

“Foot’s too swollen to draw it off,” he explained shortly.

A moment later he had drawn off John’s sock and on his hands and knees was examining the wound.

“Why there’s the ball itself,” he exclaimed, and with the point of his knife blade he pricked the rifle bullet out from under the skin where it had lodged itself.

“The bone is bruised, I guess,” he announced a moment later. “It’s not bad though, and will be well in no time.”

As a matter of fact the pain had greatly lessened already, and John began to feel decidedly improved. Samuel Smith took his kerchief, tore it into strips and bound them tightly about the wound, wrapping the soft cloth entirely around the foot.

“Feel better?” he asked.

“Much better,” said John.

“Can you walk?”

“Not without a shoe.”

Samuel Smith immediately arose to his feet.

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He walked over to the spot where the two prisoners were standing, and indicated the boot the smaller man was wearing on his left foot.

“Take it off,” he said.

The captured soldier did not hesitate. He stood on one foot, grasped the sole of his boot in his two hands and pulled. The boot came off and he handed it to Samuel Smith, who took it without a word, knelt in front of John again and began to assist him in pulling it on.

“It’ll fit,” he announced. “How does it feel?”

“All right,” said John, “but what’ll our friend do?”

“He’ll walk with one boot off,” said Samuel Smith dryly. “How about you? Can you walk?”

He assisted John to rise to his feet and the young infantryman put his wounded foot gingerly to the ground. A wisp of pain crossed his face.

“Hurt?” asked Samuel Smith.

“Yes,” said John. “Rather badly.”

“Lean on me,” said Samuel Smith. “We’ll get on slowly. Lean just as heavily as you want. Come on, Edward, we’re going in to

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Princeton. Bring along those two men that John calls 'our friends.' I'll take my rifle, and you keep your eye on them to see they don't try any of their tricks on us."

They started off in the direction of the village, the two prisoners in advance, followed by Edward carrying their rifles and his own musket, and in back of him John leaning on Samuel Smith with one arm around his shoulders, while Samuel Smith carried John's rifle and his own in his free hand.

Progress was slow. John could not help but wince every time he put his injured foot to the ground, and he was obliged to rest most of his weight on his companion. It was an hour after they had started in pursuit of the two fugitives before they returned to the Post Road running from Princeton to Trenton. When they came to it they turned to the left and continued their slow progress towards the village. There was no trace of either army to be seen.

Ever since they had set out to capture the two redcoats who were now their prisoners, however, the sound of almost continuous firing had come to their ears. Mostly it had been the

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sharp bark of musketry, but for a few moments there had been mingled with it the noise of cannonading. As closely as they could judge the firing was taking place to the northwest of Mr. Clark's farm, on the southwest of the village of Princeton.

As they neared the town the firing broke out again, almost directly ahead of them. Then from the rear came the sound of more firing.

"What is it, do you suppose?" demanded John.

"Well," said Samuel Smith, "my guess is that the firing we hear up ahead comes from our men who are pursuing what is left of Mawhood's brigade. It sounds to me as if they were just about at Nassau Hall. Those guns in back of us I am afraid belong to Cornwallis."

"You think he has come as far as this already?"

"I'm afraid so. After all, he's had plenty of time. I imagine that General Washington left a detachment at the Stony Brook bridge to delay his march and that the British advance guard has now come in contact with them."

"We'll be captured," cried Edward in alarm.

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“We’re not captured yet, are we?” demanded Samuel Smith irritably. “We’ll be captured when they catch us, and not before.”

At that moment the figure of a man running at top speed appeared in the road ahead of them. He was approaching the three Continentals and their two prisoners, but when he saw them he left the road and darted into a group of trees in front of “Morven,” the estate of Mr. Richard Stockton.¹

“Who was that?” demanded Edward.

“Don’t know,” said Samuel Smith. “He didn’t look like a soldier.”

They continued their slow march and presently were directly opposite the clump of trees into which the man had disappeared. They kept a sharp watch for signs of him, but saw nothing and a few moments later had passed the spot.

“Mistah Smif.”

Samuel Smith stopped short and looked around.

“Why, Tom,” he exclaimed. “Where did you come from?”

It was Tom, Mr. Hunt’s negro servant, and

¹ A member of Princeton’s first graduating class, 1748.

VICTORY

he was grinning from ear to ear at the sight of his friends.

“Ah jus’ come fum dose trees,” he said, indicating the grove in front of “Morven.” “Ah seen yo’ all coming along de road an’ Ah thought yo’ was dem British. Ah suttinly am glad yo’se not.”

The sound of firing came again to their ears from the direction of Stony Brook. The two redcoated prisoners glanced back hopefully, but the noise was extremely unwelcome to the three Continentals.

“Come,” urged Samuel Smith. “We’d best be moving on. Come along with us, Tom, and tell us where you’ve been all day.”

Progress was resumed. John’s injured foot gave him considerable pain, and he found walking increasingly difficult as time went on. But he gritted his teeth and marched along bravely.

“Ah’s jus’ come fum Nassa Hall,” said Tom. “De British dey done run foh all dey’s wuth, with de Cont’nentals right on dere heels. Dey chase dem right along de back road an’ up to de college an’ w’en dey get up to de college de British dey run inside. Den the Cont’nentals

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bring dere big cannon up an' dey begin to shoot at de buildin'. Mistah Smif, Ah doan lak dem cannons. Ah hear de firs' one go off an' den Ah leaves."

Tom shook his head vigorously. "No, suh," he said.

"Bombarding Nassau Hall?" exclaimed John in alarm.

"Dat's jus' what dey was doin'," said Tom soberly.

"The building is probably destroyed," cried John anxiously. "What a pity. And by our own men too."

"I doubt if it's destroyed," said Samuel Smith. "In the first place I don't think cannon could do much harm to a solid stone building like that, and in the second place the cannonading from what I heard of it only lasted a few minutes. I imagine the British who were inside came out and surrendered before any serious damage was done. Am I right, Tom?"

"'Deed Ah doan know," said Tom. "Ah left. Ah doan lak dem cannons."

"We'll find out for ourselves before long," said Samuel Smith, "but I'll wager my guess is correct."

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“Look,” cried Edward suddenly. “Earthworks.”

They had almost come to the place where the Post Road and the back road formed a junction.¹ Earthworks had been thrown up across the Post Road.

“Dey was on’y two Cont’nentals behin’ dem w’en Ah cum by,” said Tom. “On’y two.”

“We’ll find out who they are,” said Samuel Smith. He turned and glanced back over his shoulder along the road.

“Any one coming?” asked John.

“Not yet.”

Two heads appeared over the top of the earthworks and Edward and Samuel Smith waved their caps at them. The two men waved back in token that they recognized them as comrades and a few moments later the little party had joined forces with them.

“John. Edward,” cried one of the men.

“Professor Houston,” exclaimed the two boys together.

¹The present junction of Stockton and Mercer Streets. About three hundred feet from this spot is situated the Princeton Battle Monument, unveiled June 9, 1922, with ceremonies at which President Harding and Governor Edwards of New Jersey were among the speakers.

A PRINCETON BOY IN THE REVOLUTION

“Where did you spring from?” he demanded.

“What are you doing here?” cried John.

“I’ll tell you,” said their former teacher, shaking hands with them vigorously. “I had to stay here in Princeton so long as the college kept in session, and when it finally closed its doors I was unable to join the army because the village was full of British and Hessians and I was watched. But to-day things are different. To-day I’m fighting for my country.”

“Where’s our army?” said John.

“Marching out the other end of town, I guess. Mawhood’s brigade has been completely defeated. He must have lost six or seven hundred men if the wounded, captured and missing are included. This has been a great day in history. Washington has won a great victory. He proved at Trenton that he could defeat the Hessians and to-day he has shown the colonists that British regulars can be beaten too. Every one will take heart now. We have passed from the defensive to the offensive. Do you know what we’re going to win?”

“Victory,” cried Tom, and waved his hat wildly in the air.

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“Right you are,” exclaimed Professor Houston.

“But what are you doing here?” demanded Samuel Smith.

“My friend Mr. Spence and I are waiting for Lord Cornwallis and his army to come in sight along the Post Road,” said Professor Houston lightly. “Our army is leaving Princeton by the east and Lord Cornwallis, I understand, is arriving shortly from the west. Our men are tired and they are sadly outnumbered by the approaching enemy, so that it would be rather unfortunate if the two should meet. Mr. Spence and I discovered this nice old cannon stationed behind the earthworks which the Hessians threw up a few weeks ago while they were in Princeton, and it occurred to us we might use it to welcome Lord Cornwallis to Princeton. Of course the welcome may be of rather short duration, but every minute that we can delay his lordship gives our army another minute to increase the distance between the British and themselves.”

Samuel Smith's eyes shone.

“An adventure after my own heart,” he cried. “Can't we stay here and help?”

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“We may all be captured or killed,” said Professor Houston. “We can’t oppose a whole army for long and we may not get away.”

“I repeat,” said Samuel Smith, “that it is an adventure after my own heart.” Then he turned to John. “Your foot,” he exclaimed. “I had forgotten that you are wounded.”

“I’ve forgotten it too,” said John.

CHAPTER XXI

AT THE HEAD OF THE STREET

IN the ensuing excitement John did forget about the bullet wound in his foot. It caused him constant suffering, however, whether he was consciously aware of it or not, but it did not prevent his bustling around as actively as any of the other men lying in wait behind the earthworks thrown up at the head of the street.

“Just as we ’spied you approaching,” said Professor Houston to John, “we were laying plans as to how we were to make good our escape when things get too hot for us here.”

“You see,” he continued, “the earthworks continue for quite a distance on both sides. Our idea is that we can greet the British with a few charges and then when they show signs of rushing us—and of course they will—we can creep off here to the right, keeping low behind the earthworks, and dodge into the trees and get away without their seeing us.”

“That seems feasible,” said John, inspect-

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ing with a critical eye the course they were to take. "What do you think, Samuel?"

"There seems to be plenty of ammunition collected here," said Samuel Smith, looking over the pile of iron balls piled up near the cannon, and the stock of powder. The ammunition interested him more than the plans for escape.

"Enough for forty charges or more," said Professor Houston. "I reckon that if we are able to fire six we shall be fortunate."

"The idea will be to make the British think there is a large force here and hold them up as long as possible," said John.

"Exactly."

The cannon was loaded ready to fire, and all the rifles were primed for immediate service when the time came to use them.

"Dey's comin'," cried Tom suddenly. He had shown signs of extreme nervousness ever since he had heard the plans of the little band of Continentals, and had spent most of his time peering anxiously over the top of the earthen defenses, watching for the British.

At this warning all the others took a quick look down the Post Road to obtain confirmation of the negro's statement.

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“Right you are, Tom,” exclaimed Samuel Smith. “They’re coming.”

Over the rise in the road a quarter of a mile distant appeared the approaching advance guard of the army of Lord Charles Cornwallis, hot on the trail of General Washington, “The Old Fox,” who had so outgeneraled and outwitted them. The British would be hard to stop now. They had thought the Continental Army was in their grasp and their over-confidence of the previous night had cost them the victory. Many persons say it cost them the war.

People who have lost because of over-confidence are always particularly resentful towards those who have defeated them and Cornwallis’ army on that third day of January, 1777, was no exception to this rule. They were in an ugly mood and eager for a chance to come to grips with Washington.

There were only five men to defend the earthworks, Tom being too frightened to be of any use, and the two prisoners, of course, were not going to help. To make certain that they would not hinder, Samuel Smith and Edward had tied their arms to their sides, and trussed one man’s right leg to the left leg of his companion.

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“They can move around a little, but they can’t go far,” he remarked grimly. “You fellows are going to be rescued by your own army in a few minutes,” he said to them, “so please don’t worry about this temporary inconvenience. If we hold them up for any length of time, though, I wish you’d be sure to tell them that five men did it.”

The prisoners merely glowered at him and said nothing.

The five Continentals divided themselves into two crews, one of three men, the other of two. The two were to act as gunners and fire the cannon, the three others to reload just as quickly as they could. Professor Houston and John were to do the firing, the three others the loading, as that was heavier work and Samuel Smith was to do the lifting of the cannon balls.

They took their allotted places, and peered cautiously out at the approaching British.

“They’ll expect opposition at this point,” said Professor Houston. “It’s the natural place for a stand to be made and of course we don’t want to disappoint them.”

“We disappointed them last night,” said John dryly.

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On came the British. Determination showed in their every action. Tramp, tramp, tramp. The sound of their tread on the frozen ground came to the ears of the little band behind the breastworks. It was an impressive sight. The army marched in perfect order, their red coats brilliant in the sunlight, their polished bayonets flashing in its rays. They looked irresistible.

John glanced about him. His companions were pale, but their jaws were tight set and their faces determined. Samuel Smith had a rifle in his hand and there was an evil glitter in his eyes. The two prisoners were propped up in a sitting position, their backs against the earthen wall of the fortification. Tom, who apparently had seen more than enough of war for one day, was crawling rapidly along the ground in the direction the whole party expected to take a short while later.

“Get ready,” said Professor Houston.

At that moment one of the British officers gave a sharp command and John could hear it being repeated all the way down the line. The army came to a halt. Two men on horseback rode forward.

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“They’re going to try to reconnoiter us,” exclaimed Professor Houston. “Where’s a musket?”

He picked up one of the loaded guns lying on the ground and hurriedly stationed himself beside Samuel Smith. The horsemen approached cautiously, plainly fearful that a surprise might be waiting for them. The two riflemen allowed them to come on until they were not more than fifty yards distant. At this point the troopers halted and held a consultation.

“Bang.”

The two rifles were discharged so closely together that the reports sounded almost like one. One of the horsemen clutched wildly at his left side with both hands, and, as his mount started, slid off its back to the ground, where he lay in a limp heap. The riderless horse trotted off to the side of the road, while the other trooper wheeled and without making any attempt to investigate what had befallen his comrade rode rapidly back to where the main body was halted.

“That’ll make them think, I reckon,” said Samuel Smith grimly, as he proceeded to reload his rifle.

The British officers seemed to be discussing

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what to do next, and a number of them were gathered in a little group busily talking. Presently they separated and a few moments later two scouting parties set out, one to the right and the other to the left.

“Come on,” cried Samuel Smith, “let’s send them a real message.”

The six pounder was sighted, John lit the fuse and a moment later the air was rent by the exploding charge. A cloud of smoke rose over the earthworks and a cannon ball ripped a furrow through the ranks of the scouting party coming down the right hand side of the Post Road.

John and Professor Houston, the moment the cannon was fired, jumped aside and each picking up a loaded musket, sent a rifle ball at the main body of the hesitating British. Samuel Smith, Edward and Mr. Spence worked like demons, reloading the cannon for the next shot, which shortly followed after the previous one. Then once more John and Professor Houston seized two loaded rifles and fired into the British standing in the middle of the road.

The army of Cornwallis was evidently disconcerted by this strenuous welcome and pres-

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ently began to fall back. It was apparent they thought that a considerable force was opposed to them. The earthworks were well made and solidly constructed so that if they had in reality sheltered any large number of men and guns they could have been held for a long time against a superior force.

“Let’s send one after that other party,” cried John, who was now in a fever of excitement, his wounded foot entirely forgotten.

A cannon ball crashed through the clump of bare-limbed trees into which the British scouting party had disappeared a few moments previously.

“One more for those in the road,” cried Samuel Smith, a cannon ball in his two hands. “We must let them know we’re attending to business.”

After this shot the British withdrew to a spot a hundred yards farther down the Post Road. Plainly they were worried.

“That’s only the advance guard,” said Professor Houston. “It looks to me as if they were planning to wait for reënforcements to come up. You see they have no artillery with them. The others will be along presently with some bat-

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teries, and first they'll bombard us and then they'll rush us. I should say that this is an excellent time to leave."

"I'm having such a good time," Samuel Smith protested.

"I know," Professor Houston agreed, "but let's reason it out. We've already held them up for some time. Evidently they're not going to do anything until more of their men come up and that means a further delay. When the reinforcements do arrive they won't dare attack at once, so that, taking everything into consideration, we shall have delayed them nearly an hour. We can't expect to do better than that, and while I'm not afraid to die if I have to I really can't see anything to be gained by it in this instance."

John and Samuel Smith were standing beside the pile of cannon balls, Samuel Smith holding one of them in his hands.

"I think you're right, Professor Houston," said John. "Let's go."

"I think that's the thing to do," said Edward.

"And I," Mr. Spence agreed.

Every one looked at Samuel Smith.

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“Oh, you’re right of course,” he exclaimed. “But I do hate to leave. You know I never expected that I would be one of a party of five to hold up the whole British Army. Don’t forget to tell his lordship about it,” he said, turning to the two prisoners.

“You’ll hang for this some day,” said one of them curtly.

“My dear fellow,” laughed Samuel Smith, “there’s an old saying around this part of the country that if you are going to have rabbit stew it is necessary to catch your rabbit first.”

He turned around, still chuckling to himself, and tossed the cannon ball back onto the pile. As it fell it dislodged two others and the three of them rolled down to the ground. John was standing right in their path. Edward shouted a warning at him, but before he could move one of the heavy iron missiles had crashed with considerable force against his wounded left foot.

He uttered a sharp cry of pain and sank to the ground. Pains seemed to shoot straight up his leg, through his body to his brain, where they exploded in a shower of sparks. Then his head felt fuzzy, black spots danced before his eyes and he lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XXII

AN OLD FRIEND

WHEN John opened his eyes again he was lying in bed, his head on a soft pillow, cool sheets in contact with his body. Silken curtains hung at the windows of the room where he found himself, a thick blue carpet covered the floor, there were pretty chairs in the room and a mahogany highboy against the wall. He had not the least idea where he was.

He had forgotten all that had happened to him, forgotten that he was wounded, and he decided to get out of bed to investigate his surroundings. When he tried to move, however, a stab of pain in his left foot quickly brought his hurt back to mind, and in a flash he remembered everything that had taken place up to the moment of his losing consciousness. He remembered the earthworks, the British Army drawn up on the Post Road, the two prisoners, and the cannon ball striking his foot. But what had happened to him since?

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His head felt light and he decided that he must have a fever. Perhaps he had been seriously ill and weeks had passed since that memorable third of January. Could it be that he had been taken prisoner? He decided that was impossible, for he knew that the British did not put their prisoners in soft four-posted beds, in rooms filled with mahogany furniture with soft silken curtains at the windows.

He closed his eyes again, for it made his head ache to think. He dozed off to sleep. Later he awoke feeling greatly refreshed, his brain had cleared, and he noticed that the room was growing dark. He strained his ears for any sound that might give him a clue to his whereabouts. A branch of a tree outside the window creaked dismally, but otherwise all was silent. John considered calling out, but not knowing what house he was in or who owned it, he decided it was unwise.

He lay quietly and went over in his mind the crowded events of the few days preceding the battle at Princeton. It seemed to him as if he had lived a lifetime in that short period. The crossing of the Delaware and the fight at Trenton on Christmas night seemed centuries past.

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He remembered Fleetmann's death in the icy river and somehow it seemed unreal. Could it be true that such a thing had actually happened? Could it be that all the events of those busy days had really taken place? What had become of Robinson, he wondered. He decided that no doubt he had joined the British army as soon as the Continentals had left their position on the south bank of the Assunpinck.

He wondered what had become of Edward and Thomas and Professor Houston and Samuel Smith. He worried about Arthur Tryon, fearful lest in his scouting expedition he had fallen into the hands of the redcoats; possibly he was at that moment languishing in one of the prison ships in New York Harbor. Or perhaps he was only on his way to New York; it all depended upon how long a time had elapsed since he had fainted there behind the earthworks.

A step sounded on the stairs outside the door. Some one was approaching. John held his breath and waited; beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead, evidence of his weakened state of health. The footsteps came along the hall and paused in front of the door opening into the room where he was lying. Who was it?

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The door knob turned and the door opened on a crack. Then it opened further. John lay perfectly quiet. The door opened still wider and John saw that it was a woman standing there.

“Mrs. Leonard.”

“John,” she exclaimed eagerly. “So you’re awake at last.”

She threw open the door and walked rapidly to the side of the bed.

“You are awake at last,” she cried. “I am so glad.”

“How long have I been asleep?” demanded John, overjoyed to see his good friend Mrs. Leonard again, and consumed with curiosity to know how it had all come about.

“Ever since they brought you here.”

“To your house?”

“Yes.”

“When did they bring me here?”

“Three days ago.”

“You mean to say,” exclaimed John, “that I have been asleep for three days?”

“Asleep or delirious. You know, John, you are wounded and you had had practically no rest for two whole days before the battle. You were tired enough to sleep for nearly two days,

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I guess, and you've had a violent fever beside."

"How bad is my wound?"

"It became infected. That farmer from Maidenhead, Samuel Smith, told me that he changed your boot, but he left your stocking on and the wound was never cleansed."

"Where is Samuel now?" asked John eagerly.

"He brought you here," said Mrs. Leonard, "and then when he saw that you were in a bad state and weren't going to be able to move, he left to rejoin the army."

"Tell me what happened," John begged.

"Samuel Smith and Edward Nash arrived here on the third of January, about noon, carrying you," said Mrs. Leonard. "I had thought the battle was all over, although I had heard three cannon shots and some scattered musketry fire just a little while before you arrived."

"I guess we were responsible for that."

"So Samuel Smith said. I can tell you I was startled to see you being carried in here limp and unconscious. We got you right upstairs and put you to bed, bathed your foot and made you as comfortable as we could. Of course we couldn't get a doctor, but Samuel Smith was

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about as good as any doctor I ever saw. As soon as he had done everything he could for you, he and Edward went back to the earthworks at the head of the street to see what the British were doing.”

“Were they captured?” demanded John in alarm.

Mrs. Leonard laughed. “Bless you, no,” she said. “I told you that Samuel Smith had gone on to rejoin his regiment. General Washington struck for Morristown, I believe, after leaving Princeton. Edward also went off after the army with Samuel Smith, and I doubt if they had any trouble, for Cornwallis went right on to Brunswick. Well, as I was saying, the two of them went back to the Post Road to see what the British were doing. They returned in about an hour, both almost convulsed with laughter. It seems they hid in a clump of evergreen bushes, in a spot where they had a clear view of the earthworks.

“The British had turned their cannon on the fortifications, and after a sharp bombardment a whole regiment of infantry rushed them, bayonets fixed. Of course there was nobody there to oppose them, and Samuel Smith and Edward

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both said it was the funniest sight they had ever witnessed to see their consternation when they discovered how they had been tricked."

"It must have been," said John. "I wish I might have been there to see it myself."

"The whole British army was delayed for over an hour," said Mrs. Leonard. "How angry Lord Cornwallis must have been."

"Was there any more fighting in Princeton?"

"No. They hurried right on through the village in pursuit of General Washington, stopping for nothing. Princeton has been deserted the past two days and quiet as the grave."

"You haven't minded that, I imagine," said John with a smile. "What has become of Professor Houston?"

"I haven't seen him, and don't know whether he is here or not. Aren't you hungry?"

"Yes," said John. "Hungry as an Indian."

"Of course you are," cried Mrs. Leonard. "Here I've been standing and talking to you and you must be famished. Please forgive me."

"What you have had to say is much better than food," said John. "But I am hungry."

"I'll have supper for you in a few minutes."

Mrs. Leonard hurried out of the room and

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John heard her descending the stairs. So General Washington had escaped Cornwallis and got away to Morristown. What wonderful news. The colonies would surely rally to his support now, and if no further battles had to be fought that winter Washington would have an opportunity to build up a real army, one that inspired by the victories at Trenton and Princeton would furnish worthy opposition to the British regulars when springtime came. The thought of it made him happy.

In a few moments Mrs. Leonard returned, bearing a tall lighted candle in each hand, and set them on the highboy.

“Your supper will be right up,” she said. “I feel very proud now having a servant after being without help of any kind for so many months.”

She spread a napkin over the coverlet and propped the young soldier up in bed with two pillows. His foot hurt him every time he moved, and he felt shaky and weak. It was good to be in a clean white bed again, however, and in his beloved village of Princeton, so that whatever physical discomforts he suffered gave him little concern.

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A step on the stairs announced the coming of supper and presently a man stood in the doorway, a tray laden with food in his hands.

“Why, Tom,” exclaimed John. “You here?”

“Yassuh,” said Tom, grinning from ear to ear. “Ah’s had enuff ob dis yere army life. Ah’s through wif it.”

“You’re working for Mrs. Leonard, are you? What about Mr. Hunt? Aren’t you going back to him?”

“If Ah’s dragged back Ah’s goin’,” said Tom. “But Ah prefer to stay right chere.”

“You’re going to remain here too,” said Mrs. Leonard. “It’ll be several weeks, in my opinion, before you’re able to move about much.”

“But my regiment,” John protested. “I must get back to it.”

“Do you remember a letter I wrote you, saying that a sick soldier is more of a hindrance than a help?”

“Yes,” said John. “I remember.”

“Well, it’s true. Eat your supper and stop worrying.”

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

Two weeks elapsed before John was able to leave the house. When he did sally forth he was obliged to walk with a cane, and Tom went along with him, to furnish assistance in case of need. They walked out one morning in the direction of Nassau Hall, for that was the place John loved best in all the world, and he was eager to see what damage it had suffered from the bombardment.

As they passed *The Sign of the College*, Christopher Beekman, the proprietor, spied John and hurried out to greet him.

“I heard you were wounded,” he said.

“Not badly,” said John. “But it’s a nuisance.”

“You want to get back to the army, I suppose?”

“Indeed I do.”

“A friend of mine from Morristown rode through here this morning. He reports that

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the army has gone into winter quarters there and that it seems improbable there will be any further fighting before spring."

"That will help us," said John. "I wonder if your friend has by any chance some news of Edward Nash or Samuel Smith."

"Why, yes," said Mr. Beekman. "He said he had seen Samuel Smith and that a young student from Nassau Hall was sharing his quarters with him."

"That must be Edward," cried John eagerly. "Did he say how they were?"

"No, he didn't, but I suppose if they weren't well he would have mentioned it. He said something about them though. Let's see. Why, yes, he said they were being transferred to General Sullivan's division, and they are coming to Princeton, you know."

"What!"

"Yes, I understand that General Sullivan and about fifteen hundred men are to be quartered here till spring."

"That's wonderful news, Mr. Beekman," cried John. "When are they coming? Do you know?"

"Almost any day, I believe. The village has certainly seemed dead without any soldiers

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here. I shall be glad to see them back so long as they are Continentals. It will also help business," and Christopher Beekman smiled a happy smile.

"True enough," said John. "I should think you might have difficulty in getting food these days though. It is certainly scarce around here."

"That is a difficulty," the innkeeper admitted. "It is practically impossible to find supplies near Princeton, but I was fortunate enough to be able to make arrangements with a man over in Pennsylvania to furnish me with most of what I need. I made the arrangements back before Christmas on the chance that something like this might come about."

"You are very forehanded."

"One must be if he is to succeed in this world," said Christopher Beekman. "It isn't only the early bird who gets the worm, but the bird who knows where to go, and lays his plans in advance."

"Right you are," said John with a laugh. "There is more food in Pennsylvania than in Jersey then?"

"Indeed there is. Pennsylvania thus far has

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not been honored with so many British and Hessians as we have had over here, and the English and Germans are both good eaters, you know. Of course the food will have to be ferried across the Delaware and brought across country to Princeton in carts and that will be expensive, but my prices will be too." The innkeeper smiled another happy smile.

"Yes," he continued, "the food will come from a place just across the river from Trenton. Right close to where our army was encamped before the raid on the Hessians. One of our Princeton men carried on the negotiations for me. You know him, of course, a man with a queer, high-pitched voice——"

John started violently.

"Robinson, the old steward over at the college."

John's jaw dropped. The first thought that flashed into his mind was of the slip of paper Edward had picked up from the ground after the fight that day on the river bank. It had undoubtedly fallen from Robinson's pocket, and John remembered that it had stated something about making satisfactory arrangements and securing information, and now he wondered

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if those words could have referred to the business Robinson was contracting for Christopher Beekman. It was entirely possible.

“Excuse me,” said Mr. Beekman suddenly. “Some one wants me inside. Stop in and see me when you’re going by.”

“Thanks,” said John automatically. He was too stunned to think and the innkeeper’s words had caused him the greatest shock he had suffered in weeks.

Could it be that after all Robinson was not a spy? Captain Robbins had sworn that Fleetmann was one of the most loyal soldiers in the Continental Army, so he was eliminated from the trio they had suspected. Unless—and the thought caused John to start—unless Fleetmann had not been drowned as every one had supposed, and Captain Robbins had been entirely fooled by him. That was a possibility. But if he had been drowned and Robinson was innocent, that left only Arthur Tryon. He was the only one left with the kind of voice the spy undoubtedly had. The thought was preposterous. John was confident that Arthur was a loyal patriot, and besides there was another point that established his innocence beyond all ques-

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tion. The spy had followed John on his journey to Basking Ridge. There was no room for doubt about that, and Arthur had been seen in camp the very day that John had hidden in the haystack at the home of Mr. Van Pelt.

The tangle seemed to grow worse. "I know it's Robinson," John said to himself. "Unless——" Could it be possible that Fleetmann was still alive?

"Let's move on, Tom," he said.

"Yo' all seems worried," said Tom.

"Puzzled," John corrected.

"Yassuh," said Tom. It is doubtful if he knew the meaning of the word.

They came to Nassau Hall and made a tour of inspection of the exterior. The bombardment had done some damage, of course, but it was not so serious that it would not be fairly easy to repair. The rear of the building had evidently been the principal object of the cannon-eers, and in places stones had been loosened and the glass in many windows had been shattered.

They went inside. The damage there was greater, and as no attempt apparently had been made to repair it, the effects were still in evidence. The students' rooms had been rifled of

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their contents, the walls had been defaced, rubbish was scattered all about the stone floors and things were in the utmost confusion. The college library had been almost entirely removed, and the cases stripped of books.¹ This was a sight which caused John particular distress, for he knew how hard President Witherspoon, and Presidents Finley, Davies, Edwards and Burr who had preceded him, had worked to collect the volumes. A college without books is like a ship without a rudder. And John loved books; each one represents untold labor, and they contain all the best of the world's thought. Much of the progress that mankind has made is due to books. They are possessions to be prized, and any one who will steal them is a particularly low type of thief.

In the prayer hall the damage Nassau Hall had suffered was particularly apparent. Cannon balls had crashed through the windows and ripped great holes in the walls. Splintered wood, plaster and glass were strewn everywhere, and most of the furniture had been battered to bits.

“Look at dat, Mistah Stirling,” exclaimed

¹ Some of them were found later in North Carolina.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

Tom, standing before one of the portraits which had adorned the walls. "Dat was suttinly a good shot. He done took his hade right off."

A cannon ball had cut the head off the portrait of King George the Second. The ball had torn a round hole right through the canvas, and instead of a head appearing on the shoulders of the former king of England, there was a blank hole.

"Well, I declare," exclaimed John in amazement. "That certainly was a good shot."

"Dat's de king, ain't it?" asked Tom.

"He used to be king," said John. "The present king is George the Third; that is a portrait of George the Second."

"Well, Ah believes dat's an omen sho' nuff," said Tom earnestly. "Dat means de English is boun' ter be beat."

"You think so, Tom?" said John with a smile.

"Ah feels sure ob it. W'en de 'Mericans can shoot de hade right offen de king's pitcher dat means dey's goin' win de war. Ah doan keer wot king it is. Dey done shot his hade off an' dat is wot counts."

"I hope you're right," laughed John.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

Two days later General Sullivan marched into Princeton with fifteen hundred men, as Christopher Beekman had predicted. John had passed most of these two days in trying to puzzle out in his mind the solution of the mystery which had been worrying him and his friends for nearly seven months.

But he had little success. One moment he was convinced that Robinson was guilty, the next he was certain of his innocence. He tried to fasten the guilt on Arthur Tryon, but he could not escape the fact of Arthur's presence in camp when the spy had been at Basking Ridge. That alone was sufficient to absolve Arthur. His final conclusion was that Fleetmann must still be alive, that he had jumped into the Delaware purposely, and instead of being drowned had in reality been the man whom Tom had seen on two different occasions at the home of Mr. Hunt. This seemed to him the

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only possible solution after two days of thinking about it, and John accepted it. It must be admitted, however, that he did so reluctantly, for he still felt that Robinson had some things to explain.

When the soldiers marched up The King's Highway into the village, John and his faithful attendant, Tom, were waiting for them in front of *The Sign of the College*. It was at this point that the army broke ranks and the men were assigned to the quarters they were to occupy. Nassau Hall and the Presbyterian Church were the principal barracks, but these buildings were not sufficiently large to shelter them all, and large numbers of them were allotted to houses throughout the village.

John kept a sharp lookout for Edward and Samuel Smith and presently he 'spied them. They seemed to be looking for some one themselves. John limped towards them as fast as he could, and a moment later they had met. Needless to say their greetings were hearty and enthusiastic.

"It is the best fortune I can imagine having you back here at Princeton," cried John. "What a piece of luck it is."

A PRINCETON BOY IN THE REVOLUTION

“Not all luck,” said Samuel Smith. “We heard that General Sullivan’s division was to be stationed here and we immediately applied for a transfer.”

“Where is Thomas? Still in Morristown, I suppose?”

“Yes,” said Edward. “He applied too late.”

“What about Arthur?”

“He is here.”

“When did he rejoin the army?”

“Some time during the battle here at Princeton,” said Samuel Smith. “Edward and I were left behind, you know, and we didn’t catch up with the army until they had reached Morristown. You see, we went out to watch the British storm the earthworks,” Samuel Smith laughed heartily, “and we delayed so long that Cornwallis got in between us and our own army. Luckily the British didn’t follow General Washington much farther than Kingston, but turned off towards Brunswick. That cleared the way for us and we had no trouble at all on the road to Morristown.”

“Quite different from my experience,” laughed John.

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“Quite different,” Samuel Smith agreed. “Where’s Tom? Is he still in Princeton?”

“Yes, indeed,” said John. “He was with me just a minute ago, but he saw some men with musical instruments and he had to follow them. He can’t resist music.”

“I’m afraid he won’t hear much to-day,” laughed Edward. “Our men are too tired to play.”

“Have you heard anything of Robinson?” demanded Samuel Smith suddenly. “What has become of him?”

“I don’t know I’m sure,” said John. “I haven’t seen a sign of him or heard anything of his whereabouts, but I heard something about him.” He related what Christopher Beekman had told him, and then went on to tell of his attempts to find a solution of the mystery. Samuel Smith and Edward both agreed that improbable as it seemed there was a possibility that John’s theory about Fleetmann still being alive was correct.

“If he did jump overboard and get ashore safely in that icy water he must be given credit for nerve, at any rate,” said Edward.

A PRINCETON BOY IN THE REVOLUTION

“Nerve is one thing a spy must have,” said Samuel Smith. “Iron nerve. Here comes Arthur,” he exclaimed.

John turned to find Arthur Tryon just behind him, his lips parted in a wide smile, his hand outstretched.

“Hello, John,” he exclaimed cordially. “It is a welcome sight to see you again and to find you looking so well. We did worry about your wound, you know. I hope it is rapidly healing.”

“Improving steadily, thank you,” said John. “How are you?”

“Never better. Isn’t it wonderful for us all to be back here in Princeton again?”

“I think so,” said John. “I’ve been frightfully lonesome.”

“And I am frightfully thirsty,” said Samuel Smith. “I suggest that we all retire to the tap-room of the *Hudibras*. It won’t be so crowded there.”

This suggestion met with unanimous approval and the four friends were soon headed east along the village street. All the townspeople were out to welcome the soldiers, and the thoroughfare was thronged. It was a happy crowd, too, and if there were any persons still remain-

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ing in Princeton with Tory sympathies they took good care to keep off The King's Highway.

Many acquaintances stopped the four soldiers, to shake hands with them and welcome them back to Princeton. Consequently their progress was slow, but they were enjoying it all every minute. Professor Houston was one of those to greet them. He had hidden away in a neighboring barn after leaving the earthworks that third of January, and had since been staying with relatives at Rocky Hill¹ three miles away. He had followed General Sullivan's army into Princeton.

"Why, there's Tom," cried Samuel Smith suddenly. "Tom, how are you? Did you hear any music?"

"No, suh. No, suh," said Tom, his black face split by a grin that seemed to spread from ear to ear. "How do you do, Mistah Smif?"

His glance spread to the others of the group and suddenly the smile seemed to freeze on his face. His jaw dropped, he started back and his eyes looked as if they were about to pop out of his head.

¹ Later Washington's headquarters for several months.

A PRINCETON BOY IN THE REVOLUTION

“What’s the matter?” demanded John in alarm. He followed the negro’s glance. It was directed at Arthur Tryon.

Tom gulped hard and seemed to be trying to speak. He raised his finger and pointed it at Arthur.

“Dat’s de man!” he cried.

“What man? What do you mean?” demanded John.

“Mistah Hunt,” stammered Tom. He seemed unable to say more.

All eyes turned to Arthur. His face had suddenly grown livid, and his lips were drawn back over his white teeth in an ugly snarl. He sprang back and his hand reached for the pistol in his belt. Before he could draw it Samuel Smith had leaped upon him, thrown both arms around his body and held him in a grip of steel. Arthur fought like a wild man and strong as he was Samuel Smith had difficulty in holding him prisoner.

The others had been too stunned to move, but suddenly the significance of Tom’s words sank into their consciousness. In less than a moment of time Arthur had been disarmed and was held helpless in their hands.

CONCLUSION

That evening John, Edward and Samuel Smith were seated in Mrs. Leonard's drawing room talking over the events of the day.

"You say that papers were found on him which establish his guilt without the shadow of a doubt?" asked John.

"No question about it whatsoever," said Samuel Smith. "He is a spy in the pay of the British and has been for at least eight months."

John was silent for a moment. "What are they going to do with him?" he inquired finally.

"What usually happens to spies?" said Samuel Smith.

John shivered slightly and no one in the room spoke for several minutes. The tall clock in the corner ticked off the seconds and it seemed to John an ominous sound, as if it were announcing the approach of doom.

"There's one thing I can't understand," he said. "How is it that if Arthur is the spy, he was in camp the day I was hiding in the haystack at Mr. Van Pelt's?"

"Do you remember the day you had the fight with Robinson on the river bank?" asked Edward.

"Of course I do."

A PRINCETON BOY IN THE REVOLUTION

“Do you remember my telling you of having spoken to a man in camp, thinking he was Arthur?”

A light seemed to flash into John's brain. “Yes,” he cried eagerly, leaning forward. “Go on.”

“Isn't it possible,” said Edward, “that we mistook that same man for Arthur before, and that Arthur really wasn't in camp that day at all?”

“Why, that's what happened, of course,” cried John. “How stupid I've been not to have thought of that before.”

“I reckon Edward has the right answer,” said Samuel Smith. “I think I can explain about Robinson. Have you heard about him?”

“No,” cried John. “What?”

“He's crazy.”

“What do you mean?”

“He's crazy. Plumb out of his mind.”

“And you think he's been that way for some time?”

“Sure of it,” said Samuel Smith. “How else can you account for his shooting at you the day you were in the canoe, and all the other strange things he did?”

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The door of the drawing room opened and Mrs. Leonard entered with a tray on which there were four glasses. The three friends sprang to their feet.

“If I may interrupt a moment,” said Mrs. Leonard, passing the tray to each of them, “I should like to propose a toast.”

She set the tray on a table, took the remaining glass in her hand and turned towards John Stirling, Edward Nash and Samuel Smith. They raised their glasses.

“General Washington and The College of New Jersey,” said Mrs. Leonard.

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